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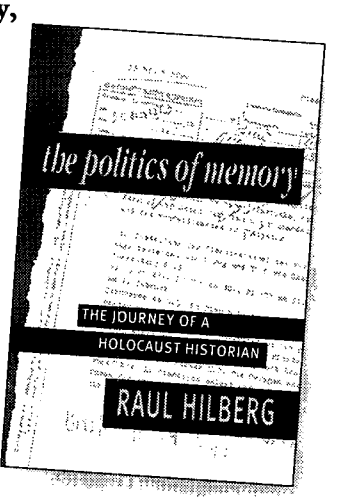

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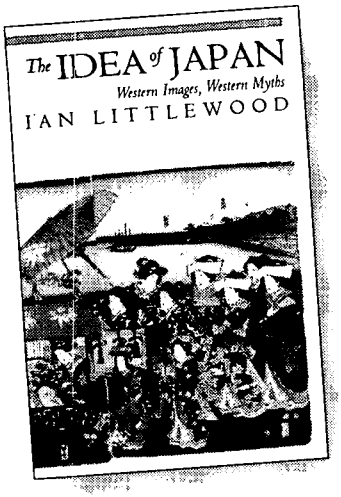

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DISSENT (ISSN 0012-3846), issued October 1, 1996, is published quarterly—winter, spring, summer, and fall—by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc., 521 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700, New York, N.Y. 10017. Phone: 212-595-3084. Subscriptions: $22.00 for one year; $40.00 for two years; $15.00 for students for one year; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $7.00 for mailing costs per year; institutional rate $34.00 per year, $58.00 for two years; single copy $7.50. All payments from foreign countries must be made by United States money orders or checks payable in United States currency. For special rates on bulk orders from organizations, teachers, etc., write directly to DISSENT. For information on newsstand and bookstore distribution write to: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, Ohio 44846-9705; phone: 1-800-221-3148.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Dissent*, 521 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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• *Dissent* does not engage in lobbying or support candidates or legislation. Opinions expressed in signed articles and editorials are entirely those of the authors.

Cover designs by Robert Schwartz. *Dissent* is indexed in *Academic Abstracts*, the Alternative Press Index, the Infotrak Academic Index, Left Index, *Magazine Article Summaries*, the *PAIS Bulletin*, University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), the *Social Sciences Index*, the *Social Science Source*, and *Sociological Abstracts*.

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Editor's Page

This issue of *Dissent* is focused on American politics, a natural theme for the season and the year. But we are not concerned here with how to vote in the presidential election, which doesn't seem a difficult (though it may be a painful) question, but with how to orient ourselves in a time when the left is politically weak. Given that weakness, President Clinton's refusal to veto the Republican welfare bill can't have been an unexpected disappointment for liberals and leftists. (Francis Fox Piven, Jim Rule and Susan Lambiase, Linda Gordon and Maria Cancian, writing before the new law was passed, explain its politics and its likely consequences, especially for women and children.) Though there apparently were strong voices within the administration calling for a veto, there weren't enough strong voices outside. If more of the thirteen million people on welfare voted, if they were organized, if the unions were better able to represent the working class as a whole, if the Democrats were still a mass party . . . if, if . . . the president would no doubt have found it in his heart to oppose the mean-spiritedness of the campaign against welfare. And, obviously, if not, not.

What kind of politics should we be involved in *right now*? That will depend on how weak we think we are and on how we stand vis-à-vis the "new" Democratic party. Harold Meyerson addresses these questions in the immediate context of a presidential year, Jeff Isaac in a broader historical perspective and with a more polemical intent: Isaac argues against the surge of optimism among American liberals that came with the realization that much of the country was resistant to the Republican "revolution" of 1994. But the country isn't really resistant, he claims, to the general rightward drift, nor is it ready for a counter-mobilization. I am inclined to agree that grimness is the best starting point for any political analysis these days. But what follows from that is less clear; his own prescriptions hardly seem adequate to the situation he describes—as the responses to his piece argue. These are questions we will return to (and Jeff Isaac will respond to his critics in the Winter *Dissent*).

In an issue full of arguments, we have put Christopher Hitchens's lively reiteration of a classic left position, contempt for "lesser evilism," into the Arguments section all by itself, without the usual response. Hitchens is taking aim at most of the rest of the magazine, and many of the other pieces in this issue can be read as responses to his attack, possibly even George Packer's critique of radical snobbery, though that is directed at other writers.

Two of the reports in Politics Abroad deal with elections that Hitchens cites to support his claim that leftists should avoid lesser as well as greater evils, and both writers, Mitchell Cohen and Joanne Barkan, oppose his views. Given the strength of the neofascists in Italy in the last few years, the victory of the Olive Tree coalition has to be heartening; given the strength of similar types in Israel, the defeat of the Labor party is a bitter disappointment. In this country, too, surely, the attack on immigrants, the English Only agitation, the eagerness to cut mothers and children off welfare, the commitment to market discipline for everyone except the rich—all this forces us to engage with, but also, I think, to resist, Hitchens's argument.

But while we are unhapppily defending this or that lesser evil, it is still important to think about what we would do if we could do what we want. Joseph Blasi's playful but serious description of a re-founded Amtrak suggests a program for "social" privatization. We welcome alternative accounts of how companies and corporations might best be governed. How should we imagine an economy "beyond" both state control and unregulated free enterprise?

M.W. □

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Limestone County, Alabama, Chain Gang *Donna Binder*/IMPACT VISUALS

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Alex Lichtenstein

CHAIN GANG BLUES

In the midst of the Great Depression the American public was treated to a sudden outpouring of revelations about the horrors of the South's most notorious penal institution, the chain gang. Even today, many people know the Warner Brothers 1932 hit film *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* starring Paul Muni. This Hollywood rendition of Robert E. Burns's serialized true adventure story *I Am a Fugitive from the Georgia Chain Gang!* (1932), cast instant national disgrace upon Georgia's penal system and made Burns a popular hero, a white everyman struggling against bureaucratic indifference and state-sanctioned cruelty.

Burns's story attained mass cultural appeal, but the depression-era left produced its own exposés of southern "justice" that achieved wide circulation as well. These accounts focused more appropriately on the plight of African-American prisoners, who made up the vast majority of those sent to the chain gang for petty crimes. In 1932 radical investigative reporter John Spivak talked his way into Georgia's convict camps, and then published a thinly fictionalized proletarian novel about the chain gang entitled *Georgia Nigger*. Spivak's "novel" came replete with photographs documenting the shocking tortures he had observed, and the book was serialized by the Communist party in the *Daily Worker*. By the mid-thirties the International Labor Defense (ILD) pledged itself to defend anyone who escaped from a southern chain gang, white or black. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People made common cause with the ILD when it successfully defended an escaped African-American convict, Jesse Crawford, against extradition to Georgia.

It may only be a matter of time before we see a similar explosion of southern prison tales, though today's public may prove less sympathetic than that of the 1930s. Since 1980, America's prison population has more than tripled, passing the one million mark last year. Annual drug convictions have multiplied tenfold, constituting a hundred thousand new convictions each year. In a country with one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, with prisons in many states under court order to improve conditions, many people (the "public") still call for more prisons, longer sentences, harder time. In May 1995 the state of Alabama reintroduced chain gangs, and now works hundreds of prisoners in chains on its roads; Florida followed suit in December, fifty years after abolishing leg irons; in Louisiana last year, Republican Buddy Roemer made the promise of chain gangs a central feature of his gubernatorial campaign. As in the past, both blacks and whites do time on the chain gang, usually in proportion to their numbers in the overall state prison population (60 percent black in Alabama, 55 percent in Florida). Nevertheless, in states whose population is only one-fourth black the racial implications of the chain gang are inescapable. Both the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), usually associated with civil rights and anti-Klan work, filed suit against Alabama in federal court, claiming the chain gang violated the Eight Amendment sanction against "cruel and unusual punishment." As a result of the suit Alabama agreed to end the practice of chaining inmates together in coffles of five men. This, however, proved something of a Pyrrhic victory;

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prisoners still labor against their will in individual shackles.

Editorialists around the country have weighed in on the pros and cons of forcing convicts to work the roads in chains, and the television newsmagazines *48 Hours* and *20/20* have run segments on this new "get-tough" policy. From what I see in the media, however, the historical antecedents of the chain gang are poorly understood. Commentators who find this punishment troubling almost always point to its association with slavery. But no intelligent slaveholder would have allowed the state to punish his laborers by making them build roads for someone else. In fact, the chain gang was a distinctive invention of the "New South," not a holdover from slavery days. Ironically, early twentieth-century southern reformers initially offered chain gangs as a humane *alternative* to the then prevailing convict lease system.

During the first forty or fifty years following the Civil War, southern states leased prisoners for private exploitation to coal mines, turpentine farms, sawmills, phosphate pits, and brickyards. Two factors led to this system: the unwillingness to expend scarce resources on building new prisons and the white fears generated by the new rights and assertiveness of former slaves. Many petty crimes that whites would have overlooked during slavery now netted blacks lengthy sentences. Southern liberals who witnessed the convict lease system complained about the inevitable brutality of a system that encouraged the lessees of convicts to work prisoners to the utmost but provided little incentive for humane treatment. If a convict died, another one was always available from the "penitentiary" for the same low price. Critics of leasing also objected to the monetary benefits reaped by favored lessees at the expense of the rest of the public. The solution? Employ convicts to improve the South's dismal roadways. Convict labor should "benefit all the people," these reformers claimed, and in their view prisoners would find a "kind master" in the state. Thus the chain gang on which Robert Burns and Jesse Crawford did hard time was born.

Observers who notice the racial composition of the new chain gangs are on the right track. When southern convicts left the coal mines and turpentine camps for the roads in the early part of this century, 90 percent of them were African-Americans. The visible nature of the chain gang rarely troubled its early advocates, who believed that African-Americans were "benefited by outdoor manual labor." Indeed, the advent of the chain gang coincided with the crystallization of segregation and the spread of black disfranchisement across the South. Like these other white efforts to extinguish once and for all the dreams of freedom and equality generated by emancipation, the chain gang stood as a powerful dramatization of the reassertion of white control over the lives of southern African-Americans. Black men working in chains, overseen by poor whites holding shotguns and authorized to shoot to kill, sent an undeniable message.

White southerners soon abandoned the initial humanitarian impulse that replaced the convict lease with the chain gang, and county road gangs scattered across the South became notorious among blacks and a few concerned whites for their substandard conditions and the vicious punishments meted out to prisoners unable to keep up the pace of work. States maintained little or no oversight of their chain gangs. In the 1930s, for example, three prison commissioners in Atlanta feebly monitored conditions in over 150 county chain gangs in Georgia. When civil rights activist Bayard Rustin spent a month on a North Carolina chain gang in 1947, he reported conditions that had changed little over the decades. Convicts labored, ate, and slept with chains riveted around their ankles. Prisoners worked "under the gun" from sunup to sundown, shoveling dirt at fourteen shovelfuls a minute, a killing pace. They ate bug-infested, rotten food and slept in unwashed bedding, often in wheeled cages nine feet wide by twenty feet long containing eighteen beds. Medical treatment and bathing facilities were unsanitary, if available at all.

Corporal punishment and outright torture—casual blows from rifle butts or clubs, whipping with a leather strap, confinement in a "sweatbox" under the southern sun, and hanging from stocks or bars—followed from the most insignificant transgressions. With the exception of a

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few "trusties," all the guards and certainly all the wardens in the South were white: thus African-Americans, who remained the majority of chain-gang prisoners, were singled out for punishment. Rustin correctly concluded that the chain gang's ultimate purpose was to degrade and brutalize.

Ironically, in a society committed to segregation from cradle to grave, by the 1930s blacks and whites began to share a brutal solidarity in many of the South's convict camps. The end of leasing and the return of prisoners to public control gradually diminished the traditional southern reluctance to punish poor whites for crimes once prosecuted only if the defendant was black. The chain gang enjoyed a unique status as an interracial institution in the Jim Crow South. Thus one of the harshest institutions of American apartheid ended up falling on the poor of both races, as it does today.

Despite the revelations that came during the 1930s and 1940s, in many states this harsh penal system persisted until the 1960s, when the civil rights movement finally forced a change. Superficially, the chain gangs, bloodhounds, and sweat-boxes of benighted precivil rights Dixie now seem remote from the shopping malls, interstates, and suburban sprawl gracing today's "New South." Why then would anyone want to bring them back? The disturbing truth is that the very features that brought the chain gang into disrepute have now become its selling points.

Down to this day southern states have combined extreme fiscal conservatism with high rates of incarceration, which has fallen disproportionately on African-Americans. In other words, white folks want to send black folks to prison but don't want to pay for it. (Of course this is no longer a purely southern phenomenon). After the end of slavery, prisoners were sold back into bondage. This was perfectly legal under the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery "except for punishment for a crime." Not only did this save the states money, corrections departments actually became revenue generators! The chain gang ended the lucrative lease system, but also proved inexpensive to run and built badly needed new roads across the rural South. And now? Alabama's prisons are overflowing; the always-invoked "public" wants more people sent to prison for longer terms; the chain gang relieves overcrowding. A simple equation: "the big advantage to me is financial," claimed Alabama's prison commissioner, Ron Jones. (Jones was forced to resign when he finally ran afoul of southern "chivalry": he wanted to put women on the chain gang too.)

As prison reformers all over the country point out, the best way to reduce skyrocketing prison expenditures is to send fewer people to prison. But politicians want to look "tough on crime," and prisoners can't vote. Here is the source of the second powerful political incentive for the reinvention of the chain gang: the public—at least the white public—loves it. Prisoners "should be treated as criminals, as animals, social outcasts, pariahs," are the typical sentiments expressed by letters to the editor in Florida newspapers when the chain gang is discussed. Charles Crist, the ambitious Republican state senator who sponsored the bill authorizing chain gangs in Florida, told me that the "visible and obvious" harshness of the punishment would reduce crime. Unlike his counterparts in Alabama, Crist has little interest in the fiscal implications of the chain gang. He just wants some of the state's sixty thousand prisoners to receive harder punishment. Once, convicts graded and paved roads; now they mostly clear brush from the roadside. The actual work done by prisoners doesn't matter; symbolism is everything.

When Florida's legislature mandated the use of chain gangs starting in December 1995, the new law actually did spark some controversy: should the prisoners be chained together at work or not? Absolutely! proclaimed Crist. That's how they do it in Alabama—five to a chain—and that's what makes it possible to put dangerous felons on the roads, and that's what makes it a brutal and degrading chain gang. Senator Crist also fondly remembers his childhood drives across the Sunshine State, and the powerful moral effect (on him, presumably) of seeing chained men working the roads.

Harry Singletary, the director of Florida's Department of Corrections, disagrees. He believes that convicts should not be chained to one another while at work, and he calls Alabama's ex-

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periment with the system a "debacle," designed for media consumption. Indeed, Singletary, while obliged to carry out the law, thinks chain gangs simply provide the illusion that something is being done about crime, but have little "deterrent effect." Singletary, who is African-American and a native Floridian, has less pleasant memories of the old-time chain gang than does Senator Crist. When told that Crist approved of punishing recalcitrant convicts by chaining them to a "hitching post" in the hot sun, as they do in Alabama, Singletary retorted that "they are going to have to get another secretary [of corrections] if they are going to do that."

It is a measure of a distressing consensus that debate has turned on just how cruel this unusual punishment should be rather than whether it should be at all. Moreover, despite its advocates' insistence that the chain gang punishes whites and blacks equally, in states with a large proportion of African-American prisoners, its racial message remains, well, "visible and obvious." Even though Florida decided to work prisoners in individual shackles rather than "on the chain," Singletary remains in the uncomfortable position of carrying out a policy which he and many other African-Americans cannot regard with equanimity. The chain gang stands out as one of the most deeply felt symbols and experiences of white oppression and abuse and as a rebuke to conceptions of fairness and justice in the courts.

For some whites, however, the chain gang has an equally powerful if opposite resonance. Just as die-hard segregationists won points with their constituency by outraging liberal opinion, the more condemnation heaped upon Ron Jones and Alabama's Governor Fob James by the SCLC, the SPLC, the ACLU, and bleeding hearts in New York who read the *Village Voice* the better, as far as its advocates are concerned. In Florida, Charlie "Chain Gang" Crist wears his nickname as a badge of honor. The image of black men working in chains reminds the crowd Crist and Co. play to of a world they think they have lost, a world where tough laws punished crime swiftly and severely, where prisoners paid their "debt to society" in the coin of hard labor, and where the members of the underclass, African-Americans in particular, knew their place. Despite the vociferous denials, this is what the chain gang is all about. □

David L. Kirp

DEATH WATCH

As two executions have been carried out in California in recent months, with several more due to take place shortly, these events have assumed a form as predictable as a Noh play. First comes the flurry of rejected legal appeals. The California Supreme Court—no longer a stickler for due process niceties, as it was under its deposed former chief justice, Rose Bird—regularly acknowledges errors in how capital punishment cases are conducted, only cheerfully to dismiss them as "harmless." Next there's the denial of clemency by Governor Pete Wilson, a man never known to agonize over an execution. Then comes the prayerful protest vigil and the noisy counter-vigil conducted outside the gates of San Quentin. Finally, at a minute or two past the chimes of midnight, the anonymous representatives of the State take another life in the name of the People.

Not just in California but across the United States, this is business as usual, the way capital punishment usually gets carried out. But the execution a few months back of a forty-eight-year-old convicted murderer named Keith "Danny" Williams was a little different. For one thing, the state has turned off its gas chamber and now injects poisonous chemicals into the prisoner's sedated body. For another, reporters, who during

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the first execution by injection had been allowed to witness only the moment when the lethal chemicals started to flow, were able this time to cover the story from the strapping down of a still-conscious prisoner until the pronouncement of death.

According to the civil liberties lawyers who went to court to secure these rights, both of the these changes represent progress, in the form of a more humane, and a more fully reported on, death. Not so.

Reliance on injected rather than inhaled poison is a distinction without a difference. The attorneys may feel better because their client went gently into that good night. What Danny Williams really wanted, of course, wasn't a more pleasant death but the chance to live.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has fought for expanded press coverage of executions, on the theory that accounts of a prisoner's next-to-last moments would sway the citizenry against capital punishment. That's just a theory, though, and not an especially plausible one at that. If history is any guide, such public bloodletting is more likely to turn on the crowds than to turn them off.

To the ACLU's presumed consternation, because the Williams execution was carried out without visible signs of pain, the reporters were won over to the cause of death. They wrote about how "efficient," how thoroughly and becomingly modern, was the process. Such news coverage makes for a Foucaultian moment, public hangings in modern guise. What comes next? Television cameras in the death cell? The reopening of the Roman amphitheater?

What's most troubling is that concentrating on these sideshows has the perverse effect of legitimating the main event—state-sanctioned death—by diverting attention from its deeper barbarities. Danny Williams was neither innocent nor mad, as the law defines these terms. But he was a diminished man. In another time, he might have been described as a creature of his demons.

Buried deep in the news accounts of his execution was the revelation that 595 pages of his prison medical treatment records, dating back to 1969—a decade before he committed the crime of passion for which he was put to death—had been concealed by state officials until the last moment. Those files portray a manic depressive prone to epileptic seizures. Where such a person would once have been regarded as incurable, that is no longer true. Once diagnosed and given appropriate medication, Williams became a model, manageable prisoner, an unlikely candidate to kill again.

Danny Williams wasn't a brilliant sociopath, a Hannibal Lecter come to haunt our dreams. Nor was he another Richard Allen Davis, the California drifter who, having been convicted of two earlier kidnappings, proceeded to kidnap, rape, and murder twelve-year-old Polly Klaas, a crime that incited an entire state to rage—and who, when convicted this summer, gave the jury the finger. Williams's "evil"—a chemical imbalance in the body, a treatable condition—didn't even rise to the level of the banal.

A handful of truly innocent men, perhaps more, currently sit on death row. Most of them (as we have learned from re-tried capital cases resulting in acquittal and vindication) were wrongly convicted by the tainted testimony of a convict—a partner in crime, perhaps, or just a person with a grudge, who bargained away someone else's life for his own freedom, whose perjuries enabled a harried district attorney to reduce, by one, the number of unsolved crimes on the docket. Danny Williams never claimed to be innocent in this sense. He was just a pathetic figure, California's latest dead man walking.

Barely two decades after the U.S. Supreme Court reversed field and upheld the constitutionality of capital punishment, many men like Danny Williams are waiting to die at the hands of the People, in the name of Justice. By majorities of better than two-to-one, the people tell poll-takers that they entirely approve. Meanwhile, civil liberties lawyers measure their victories in reporters' death watches and shuttered gas chambers. □

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Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

SEX SEGREGATION AND THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

For many alumni of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and the Citadel, the last two state-supported schools that hoped to continue their pattern of discrimination against women, the Civil War has been lost again. The suit by the Department of Justice against VMI was heard by the Supreme Court (litigation against the Citadel was deferred pending the decision on VMI) and VMI was found to be in violation of the Constitution's equal protection guarantee. These two military-style institutions, which give their sons handsome educations in engineering, the sciences, and liberal arts and a lifetime "old-boy" network of contacts, now have to admit women—and thus expose themselves to the "virus" women will bring, as one administrator at VMI put it.

Many wars were fought on the battlefields of these two cases. Alumni and administrators at both institutions did not appreciate the "northern" lawyers who came down from the Justice Department (in an action that was actually started during the Bush administration). Indeed, the schools posed the issue in terms of states' rights, of the war between the North and the South, and then used the language of the left to argue that they were offering programs to guarantee "diversity" and to benefit disadvantaged boys and girls (in their separate institutions). Debates on "difference" and "similarity" between the sexes brought forth arguments long familiar in feminist and popular literature. For example, VMI's expert witnesses argued that women were physically weaker and could not take stress as well as men, and that more than a hundred physiological differences contribute to a "natural hierarchy" in which women cannot compete with men. The fact that the federal service academies—West Point, Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy—have admitted women since 1976 was not taken into account in the lower court's ruling, which permitted segregated programs.

But in a seven-to-one decision handed down by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (who as a lawyer had argued pivotal sex discrimation cases before the Court), the lower court ruling was overturned. Ginsburg noted that VMI's separate but "comparable" program at the all-female Mary Baldwin College was far inferior to VMI's own program in every way, including its absence of tradition and prestige. This ruling also affected the Citadel, which had also instituted a "comparable" "leadership" program for women at Converse College, one that offered ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps), but hardly any of the other opportunities that the Citadel offers to men.

I had the opportunity to visit the Citadel and Converse College in preparation for my testimony as an expert witness for the plaintiff (I refuted the spurious "social science" evidence offered by the school that women required education based on different "methodologies" than men because of their presumed cognitive and psychological differences). At Converse, cordially escorted to classes and dormitories (but introduced as "the enemy") I found few computers, a dismal library, and low tech labs. At the Citadel, I saw lavish laboratories for computer science and engineering and a fabulous gym. And surprisingly, at the Citadel, so fiercely antagonistic to women, there was a real female presence—women faculty and day students (though not in the Corps of Cadets).

It was clearly the principle of the thing. Both schools fought hard, and their alumni came up with millions of dollars to keep their barracks (if not their campuses) free of women. Justice Antonin Scalia, the one voice of dissent in the

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Supreme Court (Justice Clarence Thomas recused himself from this case because his son is a student at VMI), decried the move from tradition ("the history of our people"). He argued that the court was making law, not interpreting it, by narrowing the standard of "intermediate scrutiny" (applied to cases of gender discrimination and considerably more lax than the "strict scrutiny" standard applied to cases of racial discrimination). The decision would also, he predicted, be the end of single-sex education (another sensitive debate among feminist and conservative educators today).

The traditions referred to by Scalia, honored at both schools, are to produce officers and gentlemen. Only about 15 percent of their graduates join the military. Their traditions, which range from close haircuts to abuse that would not pass scrutiny by Amnesty International, are a questionable educational benefit. And as for being gentlemen . . . . As a visiting woman educator from the North I found it pleasant to encounter the polished manners (many "Yes, ma'ams") of administrators and students, but since then I have heard about their misogynistic attitudes. As Susan Faludi reported in the *New Yorker*, locker room talk at these schools characterizes women as whores and sluts.

Of course, there is the whole question of why, in this day and age, the notion that women will pollute the environment and undermine the opportunity to become "real men" still generates the kind of passions that made male students isolate and ridicule Shannon Faulkner (the lone woman who attempted to join the Citidel's Corps of Cadets under a court order) so badly that she withdrew from the school after a week.

United in their fight to exclude women at first, the Citadel appeared to be the good sport and VMI the sore loser after the battle. The Citadel announced that it would now welcome women "enthusiastically" because it has always obeyed the law, and has admitted four women. VMI dragged its heels, but faced with losing lavish state aid and having to buy the grounds and buildings from the state, it agreed to admit women in 1997. The war between the states and the war between the sexes are no longer "hot." But battles are still to be fought between those who would like to reinstitute sex segregation and those who understand the insidious consequences that would follow. □

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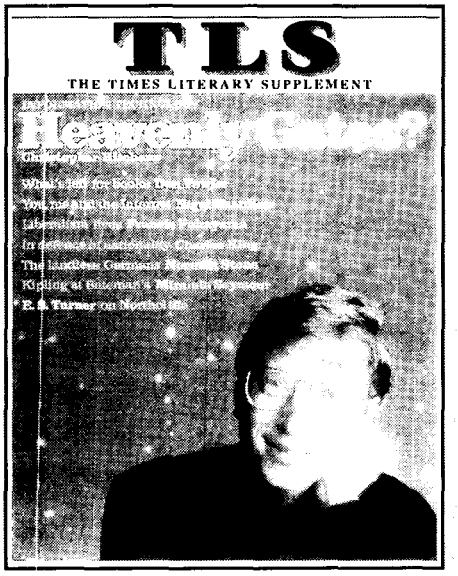

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Mitchell Cohen

THE TRAGEDY OF ISRAELI LABOR

"I'm trying to be optimistic," an Israeli friend said to me after last spring's elections, "but my son goes into the Army next year and I shiver when I think of Netanyahu making life and death decisions for this country."

It's hard to blame her. The ideology of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party is a species of fundamentalist nationalism; though secular, it claims "eternal rights" to "historical" borders, and aims to identify such "rights" with "security." The new premier has always opposed trading land for peace, the axiom of the Oslo accords. Obviously, then, a peace process can now succeed only if Netanyahu and his confederates betray their own first principles.

Likud apologists have been quick to recall Menachem Begin. He too was branded intransigent, they say, yet he made peace with Egypt and yielded Sinai. That is true—as far as it goes. He did make peace, but under enormous American pressure; the majority of his own Likud voted against the treaty and it passed Parliament thanks only to Labor party support; and Begin also led his country into a disastrous war in Lebanon. Israel was bogged down there until extracted by Shimon Peres when he became premier of a national unity government in 1984. History doesn't tell us that courageous Likud makes peace; it reports that Labor has to pick up the pieces, even when a Likud leader does the right thing, as Begin did in response to Anwar Sadat's initiative.

How Likud Won

Will Labor have to pick up the pieces this time? Can it? The short-term prospects aren't hopeful. The Israeli left—the Labor and Meretz parties and the Peace Now movement—is deeply demoralized. Last winter, after the Rabin assassination, Labor had a thirty-point lead in polls; six months later it lost to a man who had savagely attacked the slain premier's peace policies and who, before the killing, alleged that Rabin was "personally responsible" for Israeli deaths in Arab terror attacks. And Peres, according to Netanyahu, was "worse than Neville Chamberlain."

So how did the Likud win? Netanyahu is the first Israeli premier to owe his office to murder—of Rabin by a Jewish fanatic and then of scores of Israeli civilians by Muslim fanatics. Assassination deprived Labor of a vital electoral asset—leadership by a military hero who had embraced compromise with the Palestinians. Then Hamas, as if bidding perversely on Likud's behalf, launched its murderous suicide attacks. Israelis were afraid to take the bus, to stroll in town, to go to the movies.

Netanyahu turned this situation to his advantage, aided by Arthur Finkelstein, a shadowy New York political operator with a record of negative campaigning on behalf of Alfonse D'Amato and George Pataki. Likud's candidate played down "Greater Israel" ideology and instead sought to translate the issue of personal safety into national defense. He accused Peres of "contracting out" Israeli security to Yasir Arafat. Rabin, with his long army career, could have countered him; Peres failed to do so, even with foreign minister Ehud Barak (former military chief of staff) by his side. In fact, the chief of Israel's internal security service, the Shin Bet, reports that cooperation between Israeli and

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Palestinian security forces foiled fourteen suicide bombings in the months before the election.

Netanyahu was also abetted by a new election law. In the past, Israel's premier was the leader of the largest party in the 120-member Knesset, the latter elected by proportional representation. Had this been in effect in 1996, Peres might still be in office, as Labor came in first with thirty-four seats to Likud's thirty-two. But in the old system no party ever won a majority, necessitating coalition governments dependent on small (usually religious) parties that made extortive demands for their support. Israelis grew weary of such blackmail, and so a new system was designed by four Tel Aviv University law professors.

It is remarkably ill-conceived. The prime minister is elected directly, but the Knesset is still chosen by proportional representation. So the head of government no longer depends on coalition-squabbling for his office, although his cabinet, requiring a vote of confidence, does. The premier can, nevertheless, be removed by a majority vote of no-confidence, while ministers can be ousted only by a vote of seventy. "This is an election law from Chelm," says a veteran Israeli political scientist, referring to the mythical East European Jewish town whose inhabitants always get things wrong.

The outcome: Netanyahu prevailed by 0.9 percent of the vote, despite Labor's lead in seats. Both major parties lost mandates while the religious parties gained. So, rather than weakening small parties, as its planners hoped, the new system encouraged split voting to their advantage. You didn't have to choose Likud or Labor to support their respective leaders for prime minister; you could vote for Netanyahu or Peres directly and then for another party in the Knesset ballot.

Netanyahu exploited the novel structure well. Not only did religious voters mobilize for him—thanks partly to intense efforts by Ariel Sharon—but he hurt Labor by encouraging his friend Natan (Anatoly) Sharansky to launch a party of Russian immigrants. In 1992, many Russians voted Labor, angry when the Likud jeopardized U.S. loan guarantees for the sake of West Bank settlements. In 1996 they were unhappy with Labor's record in providing jobs and housing; Sharansky translated this discontent into identity politics, Israel-style. Leaflets calling for a "Netanyahu-Sharansky" split vote appeared in immigrant quarters. Sharansky won seven seats. Add the religious and Likud tallies and you have a Likud government.

Oddly enough, Likud had another factor in its corner: Labor's campaign. Because it seemed initially to have so much going for it—Rabin's legacy, the peace process, a flourishing economy—Labor assumed it had enough momentum to carry the day. But Peres wanted a victory on his own terms and not due to Rabin's memory. Campaign chief Haim Ramon opted for a noncombative strategy that deemphasized the assassination. Within Labor there was talk that a "Rabin generation" had been born; the youth, shocked at the murder of a national hero by a religious right-winger, seemed about to turn left. So there was no need to dwell on the killing, let alone Netanyahu's appalling behavior on its eve. Labor's television ads presented images of McDonald's and Pizza Hut—the "good" things Peres's peace would bring. But the "Rabin generation" proved to be a figment of wishful imagination; perhaps it dissipated when Jerusalem's Bus 18 exploded. Some 60 percent of first-time voters (the young and immigrants) opted for the right.

The State and Social Democracy

It may seem odd for a Labor party to deploy McDonald's as a campaign symbol. Indeed, a Big Mac was never the insignia of Zionist social democracy—the kibbutz was. The kibbutz, nowadays, has problems, but no less than the Israeli Labor movement as a whole, which may well be in its twilight. The source of its crisis is not security issues, however central they were to the election. Rather, it is an inability to define its own project.

This makes Israeli Labor much like social democratic movements everywhere. Yet there is a distinctive dimension to Israeli Labor's fate; it is a movement that effectively dismantled the foundation of its own power, and thereby disarmed itself. A brief look at some history will illustrate what I mean.

The first major confrontation between the

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Zionist left and the right occurred in the 1930s. The noisiest dispute, as today, was over "foreign policy"—but it didn't determine the contest. Vladimir Jabotinsky, the Likud's ideological godfather, wanted to define Zionism's "final goal" as a Jewish state in the "whole Land of Israel" (including today's Jordan). Compromise with the Arabs was unthinkable. Zionism's purpose, for him, was best achieved by massive pressure on Britain to secure a Jewish national home in Mandatory Palestine. In contrast, Labor's mainstream rejected irredentism and embraced compromise, ultimately a partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. "Outside Jewish history," warned Labor's David Ben-Gurion "the Land of Israel has no specific existence as a geographic and political unit." What Jabotinsky called the "unity of the land" was a "spiritual fact," but spiritual and political facts ought not to be conflated. Pressure on Britain was fine, but Labor had less faith in its efficacy; it was therefore also preoccupied with building a community in Palestine immigrant by immigrant, kibbutz by kibbutz, "cow by cow."

Jabotinsky derided this, but his scorn was keenest when it came to Labor's egalitarian aspirations, what were called "Labor values." "The social content of Zionism," David Ben-Gurion insisted in a 1932 speech, "can be destructive, reactionary, steeped in slavery, exploitation, ugliness, and it can be positive, progressive, redemptive, liberating, representing social advance and moral beauty. A Zionism totally void of all social content, either good or bad, is a meaningless abstraction, lacking any living or concrete content." Labor's leaders insisted that they were not only building a state but a certain type of society; the state was a necessary means to that end, not an end in itself. In the 1920s, they saw the Histadrut (the General Confederation of Labor), with Ben-Gurion its first head, as their principal vehicle but also as the embodiment of their egalitarian goals. Within it were trade unions, economic enterprises, cooperatives, and an array of welfare institutions (health and educational systems, labor exchanges, workers' kitchens). It was, in short, a socialist public sphere within Mandatory Palestine.

Jabotinsky opposed wedding left-wing ideals to national needs. He advocated "pure" nationalism; a state was a good in itself. The Histadrut, he demanded, should be nothing more than a trade union; it shouldn't have its own enterprises, schools, health system, and so on. In the end, having eschewed institution building for diplomatic gestures, Jabotinsky's war against the left foundered precisely on Labor's formidable institutional network, then busy integrating immigrants into the country, consolidating a growing constituency and fortifying itself.

But Jabotinsky did pose a considerable challenge and nearly seized the Zionist mantle. To prevent him from taking control of the World Zionist Organization, Labor committed itself to a historic compromise. It formed coalitions with other parties, nonsocialist and religious, to take control of the national movement, and thereby effectively elevated national politics above its socialist goals. Where the Histadrut was previously conceived as the socialist state-in-genesis, the germ of the future society, it was now to be one pillar—albeit the biggest—of a future state. The state and social democracy became distinct. Indeed, the idea of "the state" became more and more reified in Labor Zionist thinking; "the state"—the means—increasingly became a thing unto itself.* The rise of Nazism greatly reinforced this trend: there was a desperate need for a refuge, for a state that would accept any and every hunted Jew.

The End of Labor Ideology?

The ideological expression of Labor's turn was formulated by Ben-Gurion, who embodied it more than anyone else, as "*mamlakhtiyut*," from the word for "kingdom" in Hebrew. It can very roughly be translated as "statism." Once Israel was born, it became Ben-Gurion's guiding concept as premier: the traditional institutions of the Labor movement—especially those of the Histadrut—were to be subordinated to the state.

Most social democratic parties in the post-World War II years sought to expand the state's role in order to foster egalitarianism and curb

*I summarize from the argument I made in *Zion and State: Nation, Class and the Shaping of Modern Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

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entrenched socioeconomic interests. Because of the Histadrut's achievements, Israel had the opportunity for a different, perhaps unique social democratic experiment; the new state could have been used to expand an already autonomous and developed socialist sector. But that is just what Ben-Gurion, one of the Histadrut's original architects, did not do. In fact Israel may be the only case in socialist history in which a social democratic movement came to power and nationalized its own institutions rather than bourgeois property (of which there was relatively little then).

Ben-Gurion fought to transfer to state hands the Histadrut's education system, its labor exchanges, and its health system (he failed in the latter case). This didn't result in universalizing Labor's values throughout the society; instead, Labor values were subsumed by national (or "statist") ones, and this, in the end, helped lay the groundwork for the eventual rise of the nationalist right. Ben-Gurion didn't fear that his policies would bring such results. The nationalist right was then marginalized; the idea of Menahem Begin, Jabotinsky's heir, as prime minister was simply not to be taken seriously in the Israel of the 1950s.

Ben-Gurion's policies inevitably weakened Labor's organizational base. Perhaps more important, however, was the impact on Labor's ideological hegemony. Here a vital issue was education. Labor, having led the way to national independence, was considered the natural governing party though it never won more than 40 percent of the vote. In the 1950s, however, there was mass immigration into the country, much of it North African and Mideastern Jews. They were, on the whole, more tradition-minded than Labor, which was secular; they hadn't had the same formative experiences as the (mostly European-born) Zionist left; nor had they undergone the struggle for statehood under the left's leadership.

Yet at this time Ben-Gurion chose to undo his own movement's education system. Initially, Israel had four "trends" in education—labor (under Histadrut auspices), "general" (that is, centrist), and two that were religious. A decision was made to merge them into a single state ("*mamlakhti*") system, but the religious parties resisted. Ben-Gurion needed the religious for his government coalition, so he yielded, integrating only the labor and general systems into a national system and leaving religious schools intact. In other words, just when a fundamental change in the cultural character of the society commenced—the Jewish population rose 211 percent between 1948 and 1964—Labor relinquished, while the religious parties kept, a principal means of socialization. (In 1952-1953, the last academic year before the merger, 43.4 percent of Israel's students went to Labor schools). No wonder that "Labor values" began to wither.

There was, of course, considerable resistance to *mamlakhtiyut* within Labor, and Ben-Gurion's ideas never won the day fully. In addition to the premier, the most ardent proponent within Labor of *mamlakhtiyut* and foe of the old social democratic ethos was Ben-Gurion's young protegé, Shimon Peres. In a Labor Zionist version of the end of ideology, Peres relentlessly derided Labor's traditional vision and urged the movement to adopt a new grammar of the state, science, and technology. The issue before his generation, he said in 1960, was "not to know what we want to be, but what we want to do."

This divorce between means and ends was still at the center of Peres's thinking after he became Labor party head two decades later. In 1982 he wrote a series of articles on "New Socialism" for the Israeli daily *ha-Arets*. Japan is extolled for recognizing that the essential issues are science, technology, and efficiency. This didn't make Japan socialist, Peres admitted, upholding his own commitment to social justice in the form of economic democracy. But he didn't translate the means he celebrated—science, technology, efficiency—into the idea of a just society. The essential issue for Israeli social democracy, Peres insisted in a 1983 interview, was how to "bake a cake," not how to divide it. *Mamlakhtiyut*, he still maintained, had "saved" Labor.

It didn't save Labor in 1996—even though Labor had run the state for four years and, despite Hamas bombings, had a great deal to show: Israel was no longer isolated in the world, relations with Washington were excellent, Arab embassies had opened in the Jewish state, Jews and

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Palestinians were on their way to a modus vivendi, there was an economic boom, the country had been bolstered by mass immigration. What was missing? For one thing, a mobilized labor movement with a sense of purpose. "The difference between our 1992 and 1996 campaigns was startling," comments Pini Shomer, head of organization and the labor councils for the Histadrut. "Last time Rabin came four times to my home town, Bat Yam, and so did various Knesset members. This time we depended on TV while the right-wing mobilized at the grassroots."

The fate of the Histadrut itself is a vital part of this story. In the past, when Labor had to recuperate after an electoral loss, it could always lean on the Histadrut's formidable apparatus. Indeed, Labor mobilized its Histadrut ranks for elections, to loud protests from the right. This time mobilization didn't take place; nor will the Histadrut have the same wherewithal to help post-election Labor.

The Histadrut, for many, many years, was in dire need of radical reform. It needed to rethink and to reinvent itself as a social experiment—as a social democratic public sphere for a new millennium. Most Histadrut leaders, however, had no such inclinations; like Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO, they stonewalled until the walls crumbled. Meanwhile, a group of younger Labor party leaders, most notably Yossi Beilin and Haim Ramon, agitated furiously against "old-fashioned" socialist symbols, values, and institutions, especially the Histadrut. Beilin, Peres's chief protegé, champions *mamlakhtiyut* when it comes to the Labor movement, but then advocates neoliberalism for the Israeli economy. So the solution he and Ramon (then health minister) advanced for the Histadrut's many problems was not social democratic innovation but divestiture of everything except its trade union role.

When Ramon left the cabinet to became head of the Histadrut, routing its myopic old guard in internal elections, he carried out this program—which was essentially what Jabotinsky advocated in the 1930s and what Peres espoused in the 1950s and 1960s. He began selling off the Histadrut's economic enterprises and abolished the long-standing rule that Histadrut membership was required to join its health system. In the end, Ramon didn't reform, let alone reinvent, the Histadrut as much as denude it. During his tenure—he quit the Histadrut to rejoin the cabinet after Rabin's assassination and then ran Labor's election campaign—membership fell from a million and a half to seven hundred thousand.

"Ramon was chairman of an organization he didn't like," observes Pini Shomer, himself an advocate of fresh thinking at the Histadrut. "Reform was badly needed, but it had to come with an eye to the future. We now have to lead a political and ideological opposition to the Likud government, especially in social and economic affairs, but in a much weakened condition."

Unsettled Future

In the end, Labor's defeat is Israel's tragedy, no matter how it is explained. Though Labor may be enfeebled as a self-conscious social democratic movement, its government of 1992-1996 was revolutionary in foreign policy. It adopted, for all practical purposes, the program of the Peace Now movement. Led by Rabin, Peres, and Beilin (who was central to Oslo), it opened the way to a dramatic transformation of Arab-Israeli relations. Indeed, the way was opened to a new Mideast.

Nobody expected it to come smoothly or without opposition—nobody who knows the region, anyway. Still, under Rabin and Peres a fair deal for the Palestinians was in the offing together with Israel's integration into the Mideast. Fewer and fewer Palestinians were subject to occupation, and Israelis were being welcomed to more and more Arab capitals. It is true that Israelis, preoccupied with security, were divided about the risks in the peace process; they remain so today. Yet while Rabin or Peres was premier, creative progress was possible. Now the right has the strong advantage.

Since the famous handshake between Rabin and Arafat, the peace process has been loudly decried on two fronts in the United States. On one hand there are critics like Edward Said, who long presented himself as a "moderate." Said was once Arafat's arch-apologist (especially to the left), but he turned on him the moment the

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PLO's head sought a real compromise. For Said, Oslo was worthless from the start because the Palestinians didn't get everything immediately. Of course *he* hasn't been living under occupation; his position is that of someone who suffers no consequences for his politics. It also demonstrates a meager grasp of diplomacy (nobody secures everything at the beginning of negotiations); just as meager as his grasp of history when he insists that little differentiates left and right in Israel since both, finally, are Zionist demons.

Israeli Arabs have a better sense of things. They turned out in unprecedented numbers to vote for Peres, despite considerable outrage at the botched Israeli retaliatory raid in Lebanon in April, with its high civilian toll. When the PLO dropped clauses in its covenant calling for Israel's end, Labor dropped officially its opposition to a Palestinian state. Peres wanted to strengthen Arafat while Netanyahu wants to weaken him. If Arafat is undone and then Hamas and the Likud are the "sole representatives" of their respective sides, the consequences will be disastrous.

Then, on the other hand, we have Said's strange bedfellows—Netanyahu's backers and apologists in the press (the columns of A.M. Rosenthal and William Safire read like Likud press releases) and in the American Jewish community. They blustered loudly and often demagogically against Labor's peace process and now rush to clean up Netanyahu. Why, he's "pragmatic"—didn't you know?—and not so different from Rabin and Peres after all. So all of Israel's friends should unite behind him and hold their tongues.

They should not. Instead, Israel's friends should say loudly, clearly, repeatedly: Jerusalem should fulfill all its Oslo obligations, in spirit and in letter. There should be no new settlers in the territories. The PLO, however difficult or trying the new circumstances, should continue to pursue its goals peacefully. The Israeli opposition—Labor, Meretz, Peace Now—must be given a voice and supported. And Washington should press the peace process forward forcefully, allowing no wiggle room for the Likud's grand illusion—that there can be peace without real compromise. □

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Joanne Barkan

ITALY: STEP RIGHT UP TO THE CENTER

JUNE 1996. TURIN, ITALY: After a seventeen-year absence, no surprise that I had forgotten how lovely much of this city is: deep porticos running up and down the boulevards, giving shade to posh cafés and shops; baroque *palazzi* whose carved decoration stands somewhere between French and Italian in style; and just across the tree-lined banks of the Po river, steep green hills dotted with villas and, higher, cherry orchards and meadows.

Turin puts forward a stately facade, appropriate to its place in modern Italian history as seat of the House of Savoy, birthplace of the *Risorgimento*, and first capital of a united Italy. Since the turn of the century, it has also represented industrial society—home to Fiat and "Fordism," and—for leftists—heart of the Italian workers' movement. To think of Turin is to think of Antonio Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* group, the "red biennium" of 1919-1920 with its revolutionary workers' councils and factory occupations, the massive antifascist strikes in 1943 and 1944, when workers risked death or deportation to Germany, and the long workers' insurgency that began in the late 1960s and lasted well into the next decade.

All that ended abruptly in 1980 when Fiat workers staged the longest strike in Italy's postwar history and lost badly. For Italians, the 1980 strike marks the end of both Fordism and the centrality of the industrial workers' movement. Since then, the city has been looking for that elusive "post-Fordist identity in the global economy" (who isn't these days?). The search goes on. As a sign of the times, Turin's citizens elected a new type of center-left city government in 1993, proudly hailed as the prototype for Romano Prodi's national government, elected last April. I wanted to see what all the hoopla was about.

The Architect

Giorgio Rosental has a successful architectural practice with offices in the San Salvario neighborhood, down the street from Turin's synagogue and the little piazza named for author Primo Levi. Rosental is the son of an East European Jew who managed to elude the Nazis more than once before settling in Turin. The younger Rosental always steered clear of politics, espousing his father's mix of antifascism and anticommunism, even during the late 1960s, when most other students were making the revolution. Then suddenly in 1993, he decided to help organize the new center-left coalition, Alliance for Turin, headed by a troupe of neophytes, professionals from other fields like himself. The coalition put up its candidate for mayor; Rosental ran for city council; they won.

"Everything had changed," Rosental explained. "The courts unmasked the political corruption in Italy, the old party system fell apart, the Communists had become the Democratic Party of the Left. The city was in bad shape after a series of inept, unstable governments. We wanted to use politics to solve problems. Most of us had managed businesses or other institutions. This is volunteerism for us, a commitment to civic life."

Rosental belongs to a new breed of public official, found in small but perhaps growing numbers, scattered across Italy. I'd call them "citizen pols." Secure in their own professions, they step into the public arena with a fine motive: they want to help clean up the mess left by the defunct Christian Democratic and Socialist parties that governed Italy for decades.

Citizen pols (including Prime Minister Prodi) often bring fresh perspectives to ancient problems, technical expertise, and even a mea-

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sure of idealism. They understand coalition building. No one knows how long they will stick around or how much solidarity they feel with less privileged folks or if they recognize how fundamental is the need to rein in an increasingly foolhardy capital-gone-global. They assume markets as a given, and many refuse to call themselves leftists because the term conjures up for them traditional Italian party politics, state interference, and a hostility to private enterprise. Yet given their commitment to the social welfare state and their acknowledgment of the link between redistribution and equality of opportunity, they look decidedly left-of-center to the average battered American radical.

The architect gave me a copy of the electoral program for his 1993 city council campaign. It was . . . well . . . *molto italiano*. The introduction ended with a general statement of purpose:

> We want to do our part so that, out of the crisis we are living through, a society can be born that is above all liberal with respect to rights, democratic in opportunity, sensibly free-market, tolerant and solidaristic, and, finally, secular in method.

No problem. Then came a series of brief "general considerations" on the tax system, labor, federalism, health care, democratic capitalism, and transportation. The word "Turin" appears only twice in the document, both times on the last page in connection with specific railway lines. The rest of the document could apply to any city or town in northern or central Italy.

In fairness, the document reflects not only the continental penchant for abstraction; it reveals how centralized government in Italy is. Rome controls most everything down to the fine details of taxes, labor regulations, health care—leaving precious little for local governments to decide. This is one reason why Rosental in his document, and everyone else in Italy, talks about federalizing (decentralizing) the system. Federalism is also a necessary response to the belligerent Northern League party and its antitax, anti-immigrant, anti-South campaign.

If "federalism" ranks as the number one buzz word these days, "liberal" is number two. You can find it all over Rosental's document in both its Italian forms: "*liberale*" connotes freedom, individual liberty, and limits on the state; "*liberista*" veers off toward libertarianism and a strict version of the free market. Since the Berlin Wall came down, a majority of the Italian left has been obsessing over these words. Are we sufficiently liberal or excessively so? Can we, or should we, completely separate *liberale* from *liberista*? Should we drop the "e" and try the English word?

The debate is anything but irrelevant. For decades, Italy's large, militant, and well-organized left revolved around the Italian Communist party (PCI). All critics, left and right, had to "deal" with the party. When the PCI officially became the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) in 1991, almost everyone recognized that an era had ended. Dissection of the Italian Communist legacy began: critical support of the Soviet Union had been hitched uncomfortably to a successful effort to conduct independent domestic politics; verbal commitment to an ill-defined socialism complete with economic planning went along with local governance of the social democratic kind, which lived happily with capitalism; endless rhetoric about democracy in Italy butted up against a Leninist party structure that squelched internal debate.

What to make of it all? Most people found the PCI, and the left in general, guilty of insuf-

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ficient liberalism. Meanwhile the center and right parties were claiming liberalism as personal property. So much of the left began redefining itself, figuring out how much liberalism to add to its mix and what brand to use. The debate goes on not only among leftists, but between leftists and centrists. In fact, the left's reconsideration of liberalism has probably made the center-left dialogue possible. The concrete results so far include center-left governments with the PDS for both Turin and Italy. Of course, how you evaluate these alliances is another matter.

The Tory

I got a dose of the left-right-liberal debate one evening when I asked another citizen pol, Piero Gastaldo, where he positioned himself on the spectrum. Gastaldo was director of the Agnelli Foundation until he joined the mayor's government (the equivalent of a cabinet) with responsibility for economic development.

"I've never been a leftist," he insisted. He sees himself—if I understood correctly—as a nineteenth-century High Tory. But the question, he maintained, requires investigation of the Italian liberal tradition—Gobetti, Croce, Einaudi, Rosselli . . . the whole gang. I got a clearer picture of his politics when he commented, "I'm close to the tradition of the PCI in Bologna [a city governed by the Communists, and now the PDS, since the war]. I'm capitalistic on the local level, but I criticize capitalism on the global level."

PCI in Bologna, critical of global capital, but not a leftist. Gastaldo argues that right and left no longer make sense as categories in Italy. One wonders if this is a helpful observation in a country where the *far* right (part of which has reproclaimed itself fascist) gets 15 percent of the vote. If political lines have blurred, it is most likely those between progressive centrism and liberal leftism. (Some observers argue this has happened to the detriment of both center and left.)

I wanted to hear more about criticizing capitalism on the global level. Gastaldo had just returned from Lyons, France. In an effort to adapt to globalization, Turin's government hopes to create one of those high-speed, high-tech, post-Fordist, postnational, economic-development links among Turin, Lyons, and Geneva. Fiat, the sagging mainstay of Turin's economy, has been shifting production to Brazil, Argentina, Poland, Turkey, and Italy's South. In 1980, the company employed 147,000 people in Turin's metropolitan area; by 1996 that figure had shrunk to about 50,000. With no young hirees to offset layoffs and retirements, the average age of Turin's Fiat worker is now fifty. The city's unemployment rate is over 12 percent.

The political and economic elites see one way to halt the city's decline: build an ultramodern economy based on telecommunications, aerospace research, high-tech services, and specialized management-skills training. But don't all cities in the post-Fordist game propose exactly the same solution? What makes Turin a potential winner as opposed to, say, Milan or Paris? How many high-tech weigh stations does the information highway need? More important, although everyone agrees that unemployment is Turin's (and Italy's and Europe's) most serious problem, no one has shown that the post-Fordist industries will create many jobs.

I asked everyone I saw about the contractionary effect of global competition on Italy's economy. I asked about the destabilizing effect of both floating currency exchange rates and massive, computer-propelled capital flows around the world. Can anything good happen until international finance is reregulated and the most economically powerful nations switch to expansionary, full-employment policies? When I asked the architect Rosental these questions, he said, "Talk to the mayor."

The Mayor

I expected to meet the current mayor in the same immense hall with frescoed walls, carved ceiling, and antique furnishings where I had interviewed Diego Novelli, Turin's long-time Communist mayor, in 1979. But *Palazzo di Città* was being renovated, and an assistant ushered me into a small makeshift office. The mayor, Valentino Castellani, was as relaxed as the surroundings and amiable. I asked about his professional and political background. Another citizen pol.

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Castellani left the northeast Friuli region in 1958 to study engineering in Turin. He did graduate work at MIT, married a *Torinese,* and settled into the life of a university professor. He regularly voted left (he voted for Novelli) but never got involved in politics. Then the center-left coalition took shape, and its organizers suggested he run for mayor. With support from middle and upper-middle strata and part of the left, Castellani defeated Novelli in a runoff election.

Castellani explained that a law restructuring all local elections in Italy made running for office plausible. In 1993, citizens voted directly for a mayoral candidate, rather than a party, for the first time. The winning candidate was guaranteed 60 percent of the city council seats for his or her coalition. The mayor-elect could also choose all members of the *giunta* (cabinet or government). Thus a solid council majority and a united *giunta* were assured. A mayor could actually govern. Castellani pointed out that citizens like himself—professors, magistrates, and so on—serve as mayors in Venice, Florence, Genoa, and Messina.

Castellani believes that in order to survive, "every Italian city must find its own niche of excellence." He named Turin's high cards: the greatest concentration of telecommunications laboratories in Italy (the mayor's field of expertise is electronic communications), a small but expandable aerospace research sector, a valuable historic identity that could be developed like Philadelphia's, cultural resources for a moderate-size tourist industry, the Lyons-Geneva connection with Mont Blanc at its center . . . .

Not an overwhelming inventory, some would say. But Castellani argues reasonably that Turin can no longer live on autos alone. He, like every other local politician, points to Rome as his biggest problem. The national government holds the instruments of industrial policy—money and authority—but no one can remember when it last did something other than gum up the works. Castellani, like most Italians, hopes that Romano Prodi's government will stay aloft long enough to pass a federal reform. Until then, he said, "our problems remain centered in the cities, but we rarely have the tools to solve them."

So why do 60 percent to 70 percent of all *Torinesi* support him? I asked some authorities on the city's politics.

The PDSer, the Radical, and the Journalist

Sergio Chiamparino is not a citizen pol. As a student activist, he joined a left-wing offshoot of the Socialist party and then the PCI. He has a degree in econometrics but has spent most of his adult life working for the party. When we spoke, he was making a job transition—from secretary of the PDS for the Piedmont region to member of Parliament in Rome.

"The defect of the Castellani government," Chiamparino said, "is communication with the citizens—both formal and informal. It's a vice of professionalism. They identify a problem, hypothesize a solution, and go forward with it. There's no emotion." Then he added, "Few of them have consolidated political experience. But the rest is good. They've done a lot."

Such as . . . ? Chiamparino rattled off the list: Turin's first system of paid public parking downtown, which has streamlined traffic in the city; funding for street repair, lights, and trees in outlying neighborhoods; an international management-training center that attracts European Union personnel and East Europeans; restructured electrical and water utilities to permit some private investment; and an in-the-black budget with a surplus for old-age homes and youth services. Overall, government expenses including payroll are down; social spending and investment are up.

So what's not to like? I asked Marco Revelli. Revelli is a political scientist at Turin's university and one of those radical academics in the thick of intraleft debates. When I met him in 1979, he was teaching a course for Fiat workers on the end of Fordism. Now he is mulling over the role of volunteerism in what he calls "an age of partial solutions." He finds the orientation of Castellani's government completely off-base. "They've made politics subordinate to economic power by accepting an alliance with Fiat. Turin once had a Fordist duality of power—Fiat on one side, the PCI and the union on the other. Now that the union and PCI aren't what

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they used to be, there's no counterweight to Fiat."

Revelli argues that Turin must stop being a one-company town. He described a proposal designed by leftists to break Fiat's monopoly: Turin would invite German and Japanese automakers to set up in the city. According to Revelli, the government rejected the plan because it did not want to clash with Fiat. When I mentioned the mayor's hope to diversify with aerospace and telecommunications industries, Revelli responded, "They're crazy! First of all, those industries won't create enough jobs. Second, Italy will never do much in aerospace because it's tied to military spending, and France and Germany control military policy in Europe."

For Revelli, the left within Italy's national government has also allied with large industry in order to cope with the globalized economy. This is a mistake, Revelli maintains, because many large Italian industries, including Fiat, are weak and live off direct and indirect state aid. In the worldwide race for market share and profits, Revelli does not see Fiat, Turin, or Italy as a winner.

Revelli also commented that city politics had become less participatory. The electoral reform was designed to favor broad coalitions rather than the old host of squabbling parties. "A few people decide who will be the coalition's candidate," Revelli said, "then two candidates compete, and everyone else just watches. It's like a soccer match."

I heard a similar complaint from Gianni Montani, a Fiat worker turned left-wing journalist who currently works for Reuters news agency. "Now the friend of a newspaper editor gets to be a politician. People outside the network can't enter. Most parties don't like having new people around. Only the PDS understands being a mass organization." Montani described the "Prodi Committees" that sprang up to work for Romano Prodi's coalition last spring. "Each was completely autonomous and brought in people who'd never done politics before. They were successful, but their impact in terms of grassroots participation is superficial. Four people make the decisions. When the others find out, they're disappointed."

I doubt Revelli or Montani would like having the old parties back; most operated as democratically as the average feudal manor. Moreover, no one anywhere has found a satisfactory formula for sustaining grassroots participation in the age of television. The job becomes more complex during a long political transition, like Italy's, when a new "political class" is being born. I saw a *Torinese* version of these problems one night when the architect Rosental invited me to a meeting.

The Democrats

The *Associazione Democratici* is an informal local group that Rosental and some friends try to maintain in order to strengthen the constituency for Castellani's government. The group has a storefront office in the same building as the architect's studio; he pays the rent. Once a month or so, the Democrats send out fliers for a public meeting. The announcement for the meeting I attended read: "Everything You Want to Know about the Turin Subway: An Informational Meeting with Giovanni Ferrero, City Government Member in Charge of City Projects and Strategic Development." The necessary background for an outsider is that Turin has no subway but has been lobbying Rome for funds and authorization for years. Ferrero, a long-time politico, comes from the PCI and now represents the PDS.

Here is how the evening went: white wine for the organizers in the courtyard outside the architect's studio and then dinner at a nearby restaurant that served exquisite grilled tuna. The meeting, called for nine o'clock, began when we got back to the storefront at nine-thirty. About a dozen people showed up, most of whom had been at dinner. After Rosental's brief introduction, Ferrero recited an exhaustive history of subway plans sent to Rome, endless dickering by rivals in Parliament, revisions made just as another government fell, new Parliaments, new requirements, new plans, new deadlines. After two hours, anyone previously ignorant of the malfunctioning Italian state got the picture. The story sounded like Dante's *Inferno* rescripted by Fellini.

Close to midnight, Rosental offered a numb audience the opportunity to comment. A couple

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of people asked technical questions, and Ferrero was off again. Then an older man, not from the dinner group, criticized the organizers for not turning out a larger crowd. This launched a discussion—the evening's liveliest moment—on political participation.

No one suggested shorter meetings or starting on time or inviting citizens to select topics or trying a format other than the Homeric-length recitation. (I have rarely heard anyone in Italy, except feminists, consider these alternatives.) The *Democratici* did not come up with a concrete proposal that evening, and yet they might eventually figure out better ways to organize; the group seems to have an authentic desire and some energy. Rosental wrapped up the meeting with circumspect advice: "We can't get discouraged. We must have low expectations."

Four days before the *Democratici* meeting, trouble broke out for the umpteenth time in the San Salvario neighborhood around the architect's studio. What began as a protest against drug dealing turned into a Saturday night riot. Whites fought African immigrants whom they blame for drugs, prostitution, rowdiness, and the general decline of the neighborhood. The day I interviewed the mayor, several hundred citizens—almost all of them white—marched on city hall to denounce what they called Castellani's abandonment of San Salvario. The mayor had already called the minister of the interior in Rome to request backup for the city's inadequate security forces. In an interview for Turin's newspaper, Castellani repeated what he had told me, "Mayors don't have the tools they need, and it's unfair to unload problems on our shoulders that are within the state's province."

Thus all roads still lead to Rome. If the mayor needs more police, if the *Torinesi* plan a subway, if Fiat wants subsidized payments for another ten thousand laid-off workers, petitions go to Rome. Even the petition to end petitions by federalizing the state goes to Rome. As Prime Minister Prodi assumed responsibility for the fifty-fifth government in the postwar period, Italians had high hopes for change . . . perhaps too high.

The Professor

It seems hard to dislike Romano Prodi—the chubby-faced, soft-spoken, bicycle-riding professor of economics from the University of Bologna. Formerly associated with the Christian Democrats, he spent much of the 1980s overseeing the privatization of IRI, the massive state-owned conglomerate inaugurated by Benito Mussolini. Prodi belongs to the let's-free-up-this-market majority, but as he told author Alexander Stille (*New York Review of Books*, June 6, 1996), "To put it in American terms, we are closer to the positions of Robert Reich than to Gingrich." The professor-prime minister holds elected office for the first time.

Prodi's coalition of ten parties, called the Olive Tree, barely won the election. In fact, most commentators agree that the opposing coalition, the Liberty Pole (*Polo della Libertà*), blew the race. The *Polo*'s candidate for prime minister, media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, ran a shrill, anachronistically anticommunist campaign gussied up with wild promises of economic prosperity. He also overexposed himself on his own private television stations. All the while, he and a slew of close business associates were being prosecuted for corruption in the *ancien régime*. Part of the economic "establishment" decided to drop him. Given all this, one wonders why Prodi did not do better in the election. The Olive Tree won 51 percent of the Senate and only 46 percent of the Chamber of Deputies.

The explanation is simple: a majority of Italians prefer the right and center-right. Put another way, the Italian left can count on only 30 percent or so of the electorate. The Olive Tree would have lost decisively without the "outside" support of not only the far-left Communist Refounding party, but also the personal party of Lamberto Dini, who served as treasury minister in Berlusconi's 1994 center-right government. Prodi now has a very mixed bag of forces, reflecting the election results, in his cabinet: nine PDS ministers, seven assorted centrists, three "nonpolitical technical experts," and one Green.

Political pundits have warned repeatedly that Communist Refounding could topple Prodi at any moment. A more astute analysis identi-

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fies the greatest threat as the centrists. According to leftist mayor Massimo Cacciari of Venice (another citizen pol), the far left has joined its fate to that of the center-left government; it would be political suicide to bring down Prodi, thereby creating another opening for the center-right (which includes the "postfascists"). Since many a political group has committed suicide, one cannot rule out this scenario, but long-term trouble from the center looks more serious.

After the huge Christian Democratic party imploded a few years ago, some of the wreckage (in the form of centrist miniparties) allied with the *Polo* and some with the Olive Tree. Now many minileaders are trying to reconstitute a single centrist party—one large enough to isolate the left for years. The strategy has possibilities, especially since Lamberto Dini has made it his own. Two minis on the *Polo* side are already preparing to merge. If Berlusconi's troubled group, *Forza Italia*, falls apart sometime, a new centrist megaparty would collect even more troops.

Thus Prodi's center-left rests on a shaky foundation of party alliances and popular support. Yet even if the professor had unanimous backing, he would still lack the wherewithal to accomplish his main task, that is, to relaunch an economy that provides jobs, welfare state benefits, and an infrastructure adequate to the global market.

Prodi shares this predicament with every other leader of an "advanced" nation. No one escapes post-Fordist perdition as long as global competition remains one big race to the bottom: falling wages, underconsumption except for the rich, slow growth, and shrinking government resources. Prodi cannot utter a word about economic policy without making the *lira* teeter and the stock market quake. He, like everyone else, obeys the rules of deregulated capital markets, floating currency-exchange rates, and deflationary schemes (the Maastricht treaty for a single European currency tops the list).

So what did my *Torinesi* interlocutors say when I suggested we need a global equivalent of the 1950s Keynesian arrangement, to include regulated capital flows, fixed exchange rates, and full-employment growth policies?

Mayor Castellani and journalist Montani (who reports on finances) replied that regulation at the global level is technically impossible; what you try to pin down in one place pops up in another. Furio Colombo, former president of Fiat USA and now an Olive Tree deputy in Parliament, believes regulation would "freeze" all capital movement. Radical Revelli argues (correctly, I believe) that the problem is political, not technical or economic; the necessary leadership, coordination, and stability do not exist. He despairs. The others have decided to play what subway mavin Ferrero calls the *über alles* game. Turin *über alles* . . . Frankfort *über alles* . . . Tokyo *über alles* . . . put in any name you like, says Ferrero.

Prodi will suffer, not solve, the big problems. Yet anyone who underrates the worth of the Olive Tree's victory makes a serious mistake. Thanks to several factors—the political skills of the PDS, Prodi's commitment to the coalition, and the Northern League's decision not to ally with the *Polo* as it did in the 1994 elections—Italy was spared back-to-back victories for Berlusconi and his major ally, the ambiguously reformed fascists. The consolidation of that particular alliance in power would have undermined working people economically, the left politically, and Italy morally for a long time.

Defeating the *Polo* was so clearly a good thing that no one on the Italian left raised the old arguments against "the lesser of two evils"; everyone knew it made a great deal of difference whether Prodi or Berlusconi won. Perhaps the lesser-of-two-evils comes in two versions. The first is the known quantity; choosing it is necessary but truly frustrating—like voting for Bill Clinton in 1996. The second is new or untried. Choosing it—like voting in Italy for the Olive Tree—is interesting, even a little rousing, because there is potential; a rational being might still wonder if something decent could happen down the line. I hope Mr. Prodi will hold his band together long enough to find out. □

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Nadia Urbinati

E UNO PLURES

The European Road to a Cooperative Federalism.

Multinational countries live in a state of permanent trouble, all the more so if economic anxiety makes solidarity an issue and ideologues and politicians dream of cultural homogeneity. Federalism has proved to be the most viable way to satisfy both the need for union and the desire for autonomy; it decentralizes sovereign power and civil society alike. My concern here, however, is not with discord within multinational states, but with the sentiments of disunion arising within countries marked by cultural and political unity. Perhaps an army forced them together, or ambitious or idealist intellectuals fostered their national feelings. Whatever their history, now these people display common characteristics even if they are also locally distinct.

Political institutions contribute to constituting a nation no less than language, religion, and literary and folkloric traditions. A people that has been living under a unitary political system for several generations is, after all, a people without memories of federation. Today this elementary fact is acknowledged even by those intellectuals who dream of a federal Italy. "It is not easy," Gianfranco Miglio (a former leader of the Northern League) recently wrote, "to construct a federation in a country that does not have a 'federal culture.'"

Nothing is more illogical than a Jacobin federalism. To *impose* a federation is like trying to bottle wine in the wrong season or shield it at the wrong temperature. Sooner or later the bottle will burst. As one cannot force the art of making wine, so one cannot force mutual trust. A federation needs both a strong sense of peripheral autonomy and an equally strong sense of national sympathy: these are the two souls of a "federal culture." The rationale of federalism is "subsidiarity," which denotes a system within which the units maintain the autonomy they need to deal with the spheres of action that pertain to them, but cede authority to a higher level in pursuit of common goals (security, peace, freedom, well-being). The retention of local autonomy may foster sympathy for the larger society. Neither autonomy nor sympathy, however, can be imposed by decree.

My main concern here is with European single-state federalism. But in Europe today domestic and international dimensions are so intertwined that notions of "inside" and "outside" are increasingly blurred. The road to single-state federalism crosses the highway of supernational federalism.

Autonomy

Both the unitary modern state and the idea of federation thrived in the age between the dynastic and religious wars of the sixteenth century and the two world wars of the twentieth. Two years after the St. Bartholomew Day massacre, Jean Bodin published *De la république*, a classic text celebrating the indivisible, unlimited, and centralized power of the state as the mighty guardian of domestic order. In the midst of the wars that followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, William Penn wrote *An Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe*, in which he argued that only a European confederation could guarantee a durable peace.

Many of the men and women who fought against Nazism and fascism belonged to the tradition of Penn. Despite their different political allegiances and mutual isolation they reached similar federalist conclusions. The leviathan-

This is a revised version of a paper delivered to the "USA-EUROPE, 2nd Locarno Seminar on Politics and Society," promoted by the Biblioteca Cantonale of Locarno, May 25-26, 1995.

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state had put an end to social anarchy, but opened the door to a no less frightening international anarchy. The federalists of the 1940s interpreted World War II as a European *civil war*, and blamed the conflict on absolute state sovereignty.

Attempts to unify Europe were not new, and they did not necessarily guarantee peace. After all, both Napoleon and Hitler were universalists. They sought to create a great Europe unified under the respective banners of Rationality (and Christianity) and Aryan civilization. The Napoleonic wars destroyed the myth of the territorial state as the guarantor of domestic and international order; World War II ended the nightmare of a continental leviathan. The two myths were complementary expressions of the hegemonic project of the nation-state. Napoleon's Europe was an expanded France; Hitler's, a vast Germany. Most World War II partisans saw continental federation as the only feasible alternative to the state's power vocation, domestic and supernational. They spoke of a new European order composed of a "network of local voluntary associations, vehicles of direct democracy, united within a European federation." Local autonomy and transnational co-operation would, in James Wilkinson's words, get rid of the "old nation-states [which were] bellicose and unresponsive to the needs of their citizens."

All federalists prized political and cultural pluralism. Their models were the medieval city-republics and the guilds. Harold Laski thought the modern theory of sovereignty was intrinsically statist, and portrayed himself as a "frank medievalist." Fragmenting sovereignty was a way of lightening its burden. Carlo Rosselli complained that the state gained power by expropriating from civil society all of its "numberless forms of association, as rich in their content as they were free and limited in extension."

The many versions of federalism are all set against rationalist political ambition: to create a "mortal God" with an indivisible and irrevocable power over all its subjects. Modern right- and left-wing federalism were born in reaction to Jacobin democracy. Both shared David Hume's admiration for the United Provinces and their ability to keep a people "from uniting into large assemblies" by dividing them "into many separate bodies" so that they could "debate with safety" and prevent "every inconvenience." Hume's preoccupation was shared by the authors of the *Federalist Papers*—a text that, notwithstanding its nationalist orientation, became a manifesto of latter-day European federalists.

Federalism fights on two fronts: the supernational and the domestic. On the one hand, it seeks to limit the power of each state in order to reach not a "mere suspension of hostility" but a condition of mutual trust. On the other hand, it advocates a division of sovereignty and rejects the principle of one-nation–one-state. The architects of the European Union saw the new order not as a way of dissolving and weakening national identities, but as the only legitimate way "to preserve them and allow them to flourish vigorously in all their diversity." Their aim, Altiero Spinelli wrote, was not "one single European state, designed to become a European Nation, but a Federation of Nations in which citizens will jealously guard their own traditional home country while becoming at the same time citizens of the Community."

The European Union is not likely to become another United States, where one defines oneself first as an American and then as someone who comes from Illinois. In the United States, identity goes from general to local. In Europe, things are different: one is first of all Italian, then European. Generally speaking, Europeans share multiple loyalties, which need not be a source of conflicts. Hence the role of the European Supreme Court, to which European citizens—both as individuals and as members of cultural groups—can appeal against their own states. Institutions of this kind are meant to generate the habit of multiple belonging while fostering a democratic culture of rights.

Although the domestic and supernational strategies of federalism go together logically, historically they have been pursued separately. Until the last century, the federation remained a project of national unification. Carlo Cattaneo advocated a United States of Europe along with the United States of Italy, but his political commitment was to the latter. He thought one could construct a large federation by beginning with

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small ones. In the nineteenth century, the primary goal was political liberty rather than peace. The enemy was mass democracy and unlimited majority rule. The first generation of federalists were the Girondins, the second the Proudhonians, who opposed Mazzini's democratic nationalism as vehemently as their ancestors had opposed Rousseau's (and Robespierre's) republicanism.

The horrors of world wars led federalists to switch their focus from the domestic to the supernational. Their main goal became peace and democracy. In his inaugural speech as the first president of the High Authority of the European Assembly (1950), Robert Schuman declared that the "essential political objective [of the federative process is]: to make a breach in the ramparts of national sovereignty which will be narrow enough to secure consent, but deep enough to open the way towards the unity that is essential to peace."

Altiero Spinelli, one of the spiritual fathers of the European Union, provided a very simple and convincing rationale for a supernational federalism. He thought that a European federation would open the door to domestic federations. He inverted the political strategy pursued by the federalists of the previous century: after almost a century of unitary statism, regions and local communities had lost the vigor to fight for a federation, but the federal enterprise could acquire new strength through Europe. Once the states begin to release portions of their traditional sovereign functions to the European Community, decentralization might "give birth again to a free local political life." The European motto would then be *e uno plures*, because the proliferation of peripheral autonomies proceeds from the very process of continental unification.

Jurists and political scientists rightly insist on the "democratic deficits" of the European Union, which they trace to Jean Monnet's "functionalist" approach. Monnet's policy of dealing with prime ministers, while leaving the people temporarily outside, rested on the conviction that the union had to be prepared by transforming the habits of ordinary men and women in dealing with each other. Europeans had to be "persuaded" by practice that they could approach problems in "the same way," as nations that were different and divided but co-operating. As Spinelli had foreseen, the more the peoples of Europe perceived themselves *also* as Europeans, the more the centralized state would relax its ties. A supernational federation promoted one of the most interesting contemporary phenomena: a process toward autonomy and regionalism within the European nation-states.

Until the early 1970s, only Germany was a federation among the states that became part of the European Community. Today other states have reached a stage of quasi-federation. The movement toward decentralization is particularly strong in those countries that have both a non-democratic legacy and a strong centralist tradition. Italy implemented a system of regional government in 1970, Spain in 1978, and France in 1982. This process, however, began in the name of national unity, not federalism. The Italian, Spanish, and French constitutions proclaim the respective states to be "one and indivisible." They promote a certain degree of regional autonomy while assigning to the central state the task of redressing socio-economic disparities among the regions. Regional autonomy can be seen as a de facto federation, a physiological evolution of the unitary state once it becomes democratic and is no longer surrounded by potential enemies. Freedom and the loosening of fear encourage the expression of difference.

A supernational federation unites what the territorial state had separated (internationally) and dissociates what the territorial state had unified (domestically). The novelty introduced by the European Union consists in the fact that, whereas federalism has traditionally been a process of unification (within a single state or among several states), today it can be both a *unifying* and a *divisive* force. Since its emphasis on autonomy and pluralism tends to re-open the arguments about national aggregations, in the short term decentralization may create instability. In the long term, however, it could bring former partners closer and even promote new kinds of associations.

Historically, federalism designated a process of union. The United States became a country when its people united into a federal pact. Germany and Switzerland went from loose confed-

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eration to federal union. Until now the reverse process, a unitary state becoming a federation, has never happened without the state's falling apart. When federalism is used as a divisive tool, its natural conclusion is the dissolution of the state. Thus, Czechoslovakia became a federation shortly before it disappeared. This is the reason why regional autonomy may be seen as a safer form of decentralization than a full-blown federalism. But perhaps this is not necessarily so.

Sympathy

Hume thought sympathy to be the most remarkable "quality of human nature" because it makes possible communication among individuals, however different their opinions and personal characters. To this quality, more than to the influence of soil and climate, he attributed the main power holding people together and giving individuals the feeling of sharing something in common. Undoubtedly the sympathy that citizens feel for their own people is stronger than that they feel for other peoples. Yet, as the founders of the European Union thought, it is possible to educate sympathy. John Stuart Mill described two preconditions for a federation to work: (1) a "feeling of identity of political interest" among ethnic groups and (2) this same Humean "sympathy." The first sentiment would sustain liberal institutions; the second, national union. Mill described sympathy as the sentiment that makes it possible, in the extreme case of war, to "fight on the same side."

The root of Mill's idea of "mutual sympathy" is the republican conviction that the *little homeland* can fortify the sentiment of belonging to the *large homeland*. Mill saw participation in local government as a school of "civicness" and sympathy. For these sentiments come only with practice. A centralized state freezes "civicness" because it separates citizens from political institutions and weakens their public spirit. This is the crucial moral and political justification for local self-government and federation.

This reasoning was shared by all republicans and even by some liberals. Mazzini dreamed of a united republic, but one with a large decentralized system of local governments. Federalists thought federation would encourage union because it would foster mutual sympathy. The principle behind these ideas is that one learns to respect humanity first by respecting one's neighbors. In the gospel, duties towards humanity are called duties towards neighbors: *diliges proximum tuum*.

If sympathy is so important for federation, then it is also the test for whether a federation endures. Belgium was born in 1830 as a centralized unitary state. It gradually adopted bilinguism and created a truly national-cantonal autonomy. But its centrifugal trajectory doesn't make it a former state. Perhaps it is moving toward a different and more stable union—without following Czechoslovakia's destiny. If *union* is not mistaken for *unity*, the federalization of unitary states can become not a road to secession but to a national rebirth. Unlike nationalists, federalists seek to unite, not to unify. Their job, says Michael Burgess, is much more demanding and subtle because they have to support a movement "in a unitary direction without seeking a unitary state." A federation is a delicate combination of two equally strong forces: one centrifugal, the other centripetal. Disagreements among contemporary federalists over the precise meaning of federalism and the threat of secession in countries like Italy should be read as quarrels over where to stop the former and how much to strengthen the latter.

Germany provides a good example of the way in which *autonomy* and *sympathy* can coexist in a co-operative kind of federal state. There are tensions between the *Länder* (regions) and the state, and between the *Länder* and the European Union. The *Länder* are not anti-European; they want to participate in Europe's new politics but do not want to delegate all power to Bonn. Thanks to Article 23 of the Unification Treaty (1990), they can now join in the German government's EU decision making, and they have also won the right to represent Germany in the European Union Council of Ministers when their own authority is involved. The *Länder* want to deal directly with the Euopean Union, independently of the federal German state.

The German case also exemplifies the new role the state can play within a European federation. In order to provide a fairer distribution of

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tax revenues among the *Länder*, the German federal government provides for "horizontal fiscal equalization." It performs the kind of redistributive function that the United States government does not. But a balance between the richest and the poorest regions of a *democratic* federal state can be achieved only if the regions themselves act according to a co-operative spirit. The disagreement between the state and the *Länder* over the government's enforcement of fiscal reforms (which could have had disadvantages for the weaker regions) led the *Länder* to draft a "solidarity pact" that will require the federal government to provide an annual transfer to the Eastern regions for the next ten years, along with other economic and fiscal resources.

The German case proves that, if and when the state transfers some of its traditional powers to a supernational federation, it will still retain others, primarily those related to social justice and the rectification of economic disparity among the parts of the nation. Within a European federation articulated on many levels, from the regions up to Brussels via the states, autonomy and sympathy can work as complementary forces to mitigate both the tendency toward centralization (of the states and the European Union alike) and the tendency toward a selfish localism.

As a counter-example to this ideal balance of autonomy and sympathy, consider the case of Italy—especially the Italian debate over federalism and secession. Until recently, secession has been the banner carried by ethnic groups in the name of the nationalist principle one-nation–one-state. Today, however, secession may have another motivation: economic pluralism. The call for federalism as a way of solving problems of material inequality is not new in Italy. In the past, however, federalism was advocated mainly by Southern intellectuals. In the name of the liberal principle of responsibility and democratic decision-making, they opposed the centralized protectionist policy of supporting the industrializing North at the expense of the rural South. Today the richest regions of the North call for federation (or confederation). They describe themselves as victims of redistributive discrimination and oppose the central state primarily because of its aim to correct social inequality. Their target is national solidarity, not simply centralism, bureaucratic corruption, or waste and inefficiency. Allen Buchanan recently defined the threat of secession of the better off as "exclusion" from "their obligation of distributive justice to the have-nots." Buchanan recognizes that in this case secession is morally objectionable, but he also argues that the better off may have some reason to feel victimized, because the excess of justice is another form of injustice—here expressed as a kind of reverse discrimination.

Italy has been a highly centralized state since its political independence in 1860. Transition from fascism to democracy did not alter its vocation nor its bureaucratic structure. In 1970 Italy began its regional experiment, which Robert Putnam considers "one of the few recent attempts to create new representative institutions in the nation-states of the West." Quite paradoxically, however, three years later the Italian Parliament passed a new tributary law that was even more centralist than the previous one. As a consequence, the mayor of Bologna complained, "even the decision to institute roads reserved for cyclists has to be approved by the central Minister." Moreover, centralization spoiled the regional "affirmative action" policy which the Italian state adopted since World War II. The moral and political (as well as economic) costs of this policy have been high, mainly in terms of increasing Northern racism and discriminatory behavior. Today no one is happy: the Southerners, because a centralized system of redistribution has meant bureaucratic power and endless corruption; the Northerners, because they perceive themselves as victims of an injustice perpetrated by a political class that enriched itself more than it helped those for whom the help was meant. The former feel betrayed; the latter feel expropriated.

Not surprisingly, the threat of secession or confederation is made in the name of libertarianism. Northerners do not simply criticize the centralist method of redistribution and its corrupt consequences; they demand a cutback on social policies and reject intergovernmental cooperation in order to protect the prosperity of their own regions. For them autonomy and sym-

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pathy are mutually exclusive forces. After all, if the nation is a pure artifact constructed by the state, then the argument of national sympathy becomes meaningless.

From a liberal or left-federalist perspective, the relaxation of centralist constraints can be a way of restoring the sense of union. Even before federalism became a party ideology, the mayors of large cities advocated a broader local autonomy in the name of democratic participation and the restoration of national solidarity. The socialist mayor of Barcelona, one of the promoters of the federalist campaign in Spain, commenting upon the 1978 constitution, said that for the first time the state recognized that "public resources belong to all the public sector, not just the central administration or to the one that collects and distributes them." In Italy, centralist policy facilitated corruption insofar as the state retained not only the responsibility of redistributing fiscal resources, but also the power of organizing social services. The sharing of both responsibility and decision-making power between state and local governments is the basic condition for democracy. As the mayor of Bologna said, "It is the restitution of governmental responsibility to local communities that can offer to the citizens the possibility of overseeing their representatives" and participating in decisions on how fiscal resources should be used. What the state must do is to guarantee that all citizens have an equal access to the basic social services (such as health, education, and housing) by supervising the regions's performance and balancing their resources. The state should change the form of its intervention, not stop intervening; it should be the guardian of sympathy, not the detached umpire of a race among competitors "trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels." As the German case shows, a co-operative federalism would restore the legitimacy of political institutions while shaping a new pact of democratic citizenship. I am pleased to see that this federalism is now on the agenda of the newborn center-left Italian government led by Romano Prodi.

National sympathy can be seen as a continuum from a maximum of undisputed unity to a minimum where the ties composing a nation are broken or not sufficiently spontaneous to hold the union. Sympathy cannot be imposed. Yet it can be taught. It needs consensus and practice, and, as Robert Putnam has shown, local self-government can nurture it. What distinguishes federalism from separatism (and confederalism) is the sense of belonging to a larger community than a city or a region—a sense that in politics means that one is willing to pay, if needed, for fellow citizens living in other regions. Are Italians as indifferent toward the problems and needs of Calabria as they are toward those of, say, Switzerland? If not, then no matter how much regional autonomy there might be, they would perceive federation as another and perhaps better way of living together, not as a means of division. □

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Harold Meyerson

CLINTON AND THE DEMOCRATS

The Party of Reluctant Retreat

It's not just suspense that's missing from this year's elections. It's hope.

Oh, there's plenty of hope that the Democrats will win—holding the White House, retaking the Hill, wresting control of the national agenda from Newt and Trent and Bob. But there's precious little hope, even among the Democrats themselves, that they have much of an agenda of their own, or that such agendas as they've come up with will really accomplish very much.

The party that once created old age pensions and unemployment insurance, the WPA and the TVA, the Civil Rights Act and the War on Poverty has shrunk itself into the party of V-chips and school uniforms. In part, the modesty of the Democrats' agenda is simply strategic: they have resurrected themselves not through proposals of their own but largely by opposing Gingrich & Co. They tried proposals of their own in 1993 and 1994, and failed to enact the ones that really addressed the needs of working Americans, health reform in particular. Proposals, it seems—at least, the kind of proposals that defined the party for sixty years—are bad politics.

But underlying the strategic silence is a more profound silence. This is a party that doesn't know what it believes anymore. "[W]hat today's Democratic Party offers," proclaims this year's platform, is "the end of the era of big government, a final rejection of the misguided calls to leave our citizens to fend for themselves—and bold leadership into the future." The bold leadership assumes particular importance because the other two things the party offers totally negate each other. The Democrats are fast becoming the party that cancels itself: they giveth welfare, they taketh it away.

Still, the Democrats are not the Republicans; they can at least identify the problems (well, many of them can). They know that wages are down (4.6 percent since Clinton took office, in fact) even while the other economic indices—the ones that measure corporate profits and stock dividends and CEO pay—are up (the Dow has risen nearly 75 percent since Clinton took office). Pat Buchanan aside, this sort of thing still escapes the Republicans. Like the Republicans, though, the Democrats really don't have much of an idea of what to do about this. (Suppose nobody worked, but everybody owned stock. . . .)

With some reason, the Democrats can blame the times themselves. They weren't born for an age like this; they are (or were) the party of government at a moment when government is everywhere in retreat, when a globalized capitalism is busy unmixing the mixed economy that the Democrats created here and the social democrats created in Europe in the decades after World War II. Workers and wages and the welfare state are under assault everywhere in the industrialized world, though nowhere more so than here. If in the century's early years socialism in one country proved impossible, by century's end mere liberalism in one country is proving impossible, too.

And the nadir of liberalism is, at best, a challenging time for liberals to be in power. Ascendant in the polls, adrift in its convictions, the current administration defines itself chiefly by the reluctance of its retreat. Where the Republicans fairly gloated at ending welfare, the

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Democrats (with all too few honorable exceptions) swallowed hard, bit their lips and went along—the president deputizing Donna Shalala to totter out and defend a policy that plainly sickened her.

Of course, it's not just Clinton who's in retreat. It's the Democrats in Congress, half of whom voted to end welfare; it's all those gubernatorial candidates in 1994 who had nothing to say and were almost to a person defeated; it's the parties of the left throughout Western Europe, watching helplessly or acquiescing in the dismantling of their handiwork. What, in times like these, is a liberal party to do?

An immodest suggestion: change the times.

Going Where the Clout Is

The gloomy optimism of the Democratic party (*we're gonna win; we have no idea what to do*) is a far cry from the hope that Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign inspired. The conventional wisdom to the contrary, it was not simply a New Democratic campaign. Clinton did distance himself from a number of traditional liberal positions on racial and cultural issues, but he also laid out a progressive program to arrest the slide of working- and middle-class Americans, something no Democrat had done in decades. A Clinton campaign speech, particularly during the primaries, typically included a lesson in comparative economics, and if Clinton had a model for where he wanted to take us, it was Germany. We could do worse than emulate their health care program, their work-to-school program, their investment in autobahns and education.

Four years later, we've not become any more like Germany, though Germany—forced to begin scaling back its benefits and paychecks—has become a little more like us.

Some of Clinton's progressive initiatives died in Congress; others never made it out of the White House. The killer, in either case, wasn't public opinion: unlike, say, gays-in-the-military, the progressive side of Clintonomics always polled well. The killer here was business: either the bond market (which killed Clinton's public investment plan) or small business organizations (which nailed health reform) or Robert Rubin, his own treasury secretary, formerly of Goldman-Sachs (who aborted a good deal else).

The inside story of administration economic policy can be seen as a battle of the Bobs: the pattern here is, Reich proposes, Rubin disposes. Labor Secretary Robert Reich was the chief proponent of the public investment program that Rubin insisted had to get in line behind deficit reduction (and which has not been seen since). In the budget-slashing days of the Gingrich Congress, Reich outlined a White House war on corporate welfare, but, as John Judis has reported, Rubin hated the phrase, and the war went unwaged. This year, Reich wanted to create tax incentives for corporations that retrained workers rather than fired them, that shared profits with them and didn't send their jobs to Malaysia. Tax incentives, said Rubin, opened a Pandora's box of governmental meddling with business; the White House opted to reward good-guy corporations with effusive verbal commendations.

That is, *Clinton* opted. It was Clinton's misfortune that he always had to opt in these matters, opt between business and working people. In Truman's party, and Kennedy's, and Johnson's, there were fewer instances of having to choose between business and labor: both supported public works, elements of both supported civil rights. But Clinton came to power in a time not of shared but of selective prosperity. The Democrats had long been the world's oldest cross-class party, but it became a good deal trickier to hold such a party together when profits were coming at the expense of wages. A choice-averse president was heading a party with major constituencies embroiled in a zero-sum game with each other. In the 1992 campaign, Clinton had found a formula that enabled the Democrats to get beyond the zero-sum game of white against black, partly by devising ambitious economic programs targeted not for this subgroup or that, but for the vast majority. In 1993, Clinton discovered that he had bridged the racial divide only to come upon a chasm of class.

And in these matters, the president consistently went where the clout was. Clinton's not been afraid to take risks in the name of decency—he's done it in Haiti, in Bosnia (belat-

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edly), and with affirmative action—but on the policies that matter to the markets, on trade and deficits in particular, he's repeatedly bowed to business.

But such business obeisance has its risks, too. Supporting NAFTA hurt the Democrats with their own voters and with working-class Perot supporters who remain one of the key swing groups in American politics. Declining to go after the Business Roundtable when it turned against his health plan in 1994 helped doom Clinton's major legislative initiative. And in the 1994 elections, it was working-class voters who deserted the Democrats: the party held its own among college grads, only to see a two-digit drop in its support from voters with less education. These were the Macomb County voters, onetime Democratic loyalists, working-class whites who feared and loathed blacks and globe-trotting corporations, if not entirely in equal measure. Clinton has become enough of a law-'n'-order centrist to win these voters' consideration. But he lacks a long-term economic program to clinch their support.

He offers, instead, the choice-averse president's solution to the wage gap: more schooling. "What's missing in this picture [of economic recovery]," he recently told the *New York Times*, "is that not every American has the capacity to take advantage of the opportunities." If there's a theory behind this analysis, it would be called supply-side labor markets: enlarging the supply of well-educated Americans will increase the number of good jobs. This fails to account for the drop in incomes of college-educated males over the past decade, or for the fact that a globalized professional services industry can now find accountants and programmers in India and Ireland who have just as much education as their American counterparts, but command just a fraction of their wages.

This November, though, the Democrats won't have to account to the voters for the continuing slide in wages (and one month's uptick hardly undoes a twenty-year slide). Gingrich has seen to that. By threatening massive cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, the Congressional Republicans sought to *legislate* a reduction in the insurance available to American families. They weren't just powerless, like the Democrats, to resist the decline in living standards; they were actually abetting it. That allowed Clinton to reclaim the center, announcing he shared the public's anti-statist ideology, while avowing to protect their statist benefits. It allowed Clinton to inch—and sometimes lurch—relentlessly rightward without risking liberal support. Had the Republicans not won Congress in 1994, Clinton would surely have had a primary challenge this year; a fifteen-point lead—even over poor Bob Dole—would be out of the question.

United by Newt, Divided by Bill

Gingrich may have opened the door for the Democrats to move to the center, but Clinton moved in and set up housekeeping. What began as a post-1994 tactical reorientation has become a fully articulated strategy, complete with new core issues and constituencies for the party to cultivate, and buttressed by a partly articulated philosophy. Clinton was not, in his first two years, a down-the-line New Democrat; but since November 1994, moving right has been both a constant pressure and a tempting opportunity.

Clinton came to power, of course, vowing to be the hedgehog, not the fox: to focus like a laser on our economic stagnation. *Forget about that,* Dick Morris, his new transpartisan consultant, told him. *The Republicans are off in space; they've gone and abandoned all those suburban boomers, all those neighborhood moms. They're yours for the taking. Give 'em some tax breaks to send their kids to college. Give 'em some way to control their kids' TV. Put some cops on the streets. Take some of those spongecakes off welfare; balance the budget; and whatever you do, don't raise taxes!*

Clinton hasn't abandoned economic equity issues in his second two years: nervous Republicans gave him a minimum-wage bill, and he gladly defended Medicare and education, the popular parts of the welfare state. But even as Gingrich's scorched-earth war on government has united the Democrats, Clinton's surgical strikes have divided them. Behind the Anti-Gingrich United Front, two distinct Democratic camps are staking their claim to the party's future.

The first, headed by the vice president, with

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the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) as its resident brain trust, appends to the doctrine of *The Era of Big Government Is Over* the codicil, *And Good Riddance*! Gore not only played a leading role in the fight for NAFTA, but headed the faction inside the White House that urged Clinton to sign the Republicans' welfare bill. Behind him, extolling in equal measure the rebirth of civil society and the impending demise of government, are Will Marshall, Al From, and their colleagues at the DLC and its think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute. In a "New Progressive Declaration" they released in July, they assert that it's not just the era of big government, but also of big labor and big business that's passed away. In the face of "today's dispersals of economic power," they aver, "we can no longer rely on big institutions to take care of us." It's just as well, since Americans are no longer satisfied with "bureaucratic, one-size-fits-all solutions imposed by government."

Now, it's clear enough that government and unions are in decline—but *business?* Economic power, far from dispersing, is both concentrating and globalizing; it's the inability of government and labor to keep up with business that has undone the postwar social contract. If business is unable to offer the kind of stable employment it once provided, that's because business does not wish to offer the kind of stable employment it once provided. (The decline of unions was not quite so inexorable as the setting of the sun: business busted them.) As the DLC sees it, though, businesses have "reorganized themselves, flattening hierarchies and developing more participatory forms of decision-making." This is fortunate, since in the world following the New Deal Order, as in the world preceding it, business will call the shots, while civil society will do no more than create havens in an otherwise heartless world.

The second camp is headed by one of the DLC's original leaders, who since the late eighties has turned steadily toward a progressive populist politics. Democratic House leader Richard Gephardt broke with the administration on both of the issues that most divided Democrats during Clinton's first term: NAFTA and the welfare repeal. Gephardt and Gore are both internationalists, but of a very different kind: Gore stumping for a North American free trade agreement without serious labor protections; Gephardt turning against NAFTA for precisely that reason, but floating his own proposal for a trade treaty with the European Union—that is, with nations that accord their workers rights and wages in excess of our own. (The White House quickly dismissed this proposal.) Independent of the administration, Gephardt had planned to push for legislation strengthening workers' right to organize during the 1995-1996 congressional session (a plan he abandoned when the Republicans won control).

If Dick Morris's America is a nation of edge cities and affluent suburbs where voters are prey more to a myriad of social anxieties than to one big economic one, Dick Gephardt's America is centered in inner cities and less affluent suburbs, where the economic *angst* is palpable. (Like Democratic whip David Bonior, Gephardt represents a largely working-class suburb of a rust-belt metropolis.) He's grappling, as Clinton and Gore are not, with the Democrats' most fundamental dilemma: they cannot reinvent growth with equity—simply put, they can't raise wages—with unions so feeble and within a *laissez-faire* global economy that's beyond any government's control.

The Progressive Wanna-bes

Which is exactly what makes Gephardt's idea of a trade zone with Europe so radical. He is proposing, with no great fanfare, to change the times. He is proposing to do to a newly global economy what the New Deal Democrats did to a newly national economy: reduce the sovereignty of the markets, increase the power of workers, raise living standards in the poorer regions rather than lower them in the wealthier ones.

At the level of transnational politics, there are any number of policies that the United States could pursue to further these ends. The Clinton administration is already trying to have sanctions against child labor written into World Trade Organization regulations. But it could also push to include the kind of minimum wage and human rights standards in trade agreements that were pointedly omitted from NAFTA. It could

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seek to implement social tariffs against nations that violated those standards. It could work with the other major industrial powers to regulate and tax the currency market, which threatens a run on any government that dares reduce its unemployment or shore up its safety net.

At the level of merely national politics, the Clinton-Dick Morris upscale strategy will succeed so long as Gingrich is speaker and Dole the opposition. The Democrats won't always be so fortunate; at some point, they will have to produce some economic gains, some assurance of security for their middle- and working-class supporters. They will need a Federal Reserve that believes in growth (which becomes more plausible if they move with other nations against the currency markets). They will need a labor movement that bargains contracts for more than 15 percent of the workforce.

They need that labor movement just to win elections. The story of the Democrats' decline, of the splintering of the party into ethnic camps and camplets, is in many ways the story of the deunionization of America. Union members voted 12 percent more Democratic in the 1994 congressional elections than their non-union counterparts; at the presidential level, that twelve-point advantage has been roughly unchanged since the sixties. White male union members voted 18 percent more Democratic than their nonunion counterparts in 1994. The shrinking of unions foretells the shrinking of Democratic votes, just as it foretells the shrinking of wages.

The most promising development in America during Clinton's term of office—hell, the *only* promising development—is the transformation of the AFL-CIO, suddenly awakened from its forty-year nap. Federation ads played a key role in intimidating Republican members of Congress into supporting a hike in the minimum wage. The federation is waging an ambitious campaign for Democratic congressional candidates this fall, with one particularly welcome departure from past practice: it is briefing the candidates up front on labor issues. The single most important lesson should be the necessity for reforming labor law so that workers can again join unions without fear of retribution. If the congressional candidates aren't moved by an appeal to democratic principle, they should at least be moved by the appeal to Democratic prospects.

Whether the Democrats acquiesce in the smashing of the social compact or work to build a more global one is largely a function of whatever pressure a class-based left can bring to bear on them. Right now, despite the stirrings on 16th Street, that's not very much. Unless that pressure increases, though, it's hard to see how the party can regain anything like the majority status it held during the years the social compact was in place. Minus that compact, the Democrats stand for nothing. Minus that compact, it's hard to see why the nation should stand for them.

For now, though, they are all Progressives. Since E.J. Dionne's book proclaimed the second coming of the Progressive Era, Democrats of all persuasions have labeled themselves the New Progressives, and none more so than the current occupant of the White House.

But whether that new progressive age has actually begun, much less whether Clinton is its leader, is subject to some skepticism. After all, it took the first Progressives something like fifty years—from the 1890s until the 1930s and 1940s—to reform a newly national economy. During the rise of that economy, most of the presidents—Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland, Harrison, McKinley, Harding, Coolidge, Taft—passed in a blur. Business was national then but government and unions still largely local—and ineffectual. A TR or a Wilson might tinker with the new economic order, but the parade of presidential pipsqueaks simply got out of business's way.

Business is global now but government and unions still largely national—ineffectual all over again. The new progressivism, as Dionne himself asserts, is more option than accomplished fact. And Clinton—champion of family leave (unpaid) and universal health care (unrealized), bringer of NAFTA and ender of welfare as we know it—looks less like a Roosevelt attacking the new order than a Cleveland hastening it along. Not quite the neoprogressive, more nearly the neopipsqueak. □

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Jeffrey C. Isaac

THE POVERTY OF PROGRESSIVISM

Thoughts on American Democracy

American democracy is at a watershed. The so-called "social contract" governing American politics since 1945 has broken down. Although the talk of a "Republican Revolution" is surely hyperbolic, the conservative Republican agenda has significant political momentum, and it seeks to effect a serious transformation of the infrastructure of postwar liberal democracy—a drastic retrenchment of federal social policy, a reduction of the fiscal and policy resources of the federal government, and a devolution of political power to state and local governments. The conservative vision rests on a rhetoric of pseudodemocratic populism that counterposes a mythic America to an unsavory cast of characters—variously called "liberal elites," "the Washington establishment," and "the counterculture"—who are purported to rule America and to be responsible for the corruption of its economy and its soul. It is no exaggeration to say that this vision represents a repudiation of the spirit of progressive social reform that has prevailed in the United States for the past century.

This assault on liberal politics is the surface expression of deeper difficulties confronting American liberal democracy. Our party system is in disrepute, and public faith in and engagement with the political system has plummeted. American political culture is fractured along racial lines and riven by "culture wars" that have badly damaged the social consensus on which postwar liberalism rested, and these fractures have helped to fuel the emergence of a potent, if small, movement of right-wing extremists. Accompanying the growth of alienation and resentment is a breakdown of the conditions of economic growth that helped to sustain postwar liberalism. New forms of global investment have created a "lean and mean" economy in which relatively secure and high-paying employment increasingly has given way to insecure low-wage jobs. The real wage of the average American worker has stagnated, and inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth have grown.

American liberalism, then, is politically adrift. Yet a powerful liberal response has recently emerged. Liberal democrats, it is argued, need to revive a "progressive" politics that is modeled heavily on the Progressive movement of the last century. Like the citizens of the 1890s, it is argued, we are poised at the dawn of a new century, confronting severe challenges that demand a new spirit of reform and a new "activist public policy," centered around the problems of a postindustrial economy and the decline of middle-class living standards.

While I find this argument in some ways compelling, I believe it is anachronistic, and that democrats who wish to address the serious problems confronting American liberal democracy should think about these questions in a different way. The conditions that made previous reform efforts possible no longer obtain, and the political world that we inhabit can support neither the policies contemporary progressives envision nor the confidence in political agency that these policies presuppose. This does not mean that responses to our current difficulties are impossible. But a meaningful democratic politics for the new century must be *chastened* in a way that the new progressive arguments are not.

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The New Progressivism

Emanating from the center and the center-left of the Democratic party, the new progressivism wishes to revive the project of social reform initiated by the turn-of-the-century Progressives.* John Judis and Michael Lind's manifesto "For a New American Nationalism," the centerpiece of a March 1995 issue of the *New Republic*, helped to bring these arguments to the fore. Criticizing the incoherence of the Clinton administration and the "primitive anti-statism" of Gingrichite Republicanism, Judis and Lind call for a "new nationalism," inspired by the examples of Alexander Hamilton, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt, and summed up in Herbert Croly's influential *The Promise of American Life* (1909). As they write:

> America today faces a situation roughly analogous to the one Roosevelt and the progressives faced. Workers are not threatening to man the barricades against capitalists, but society is divided into mutually hostile camps . . . the goal of a new nationalism today is to forestall these looming divisions in American society . . . . Can we meet these challenges? In the decades between Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, the country floundered as badly as it has during the last few decades. Their mountebanks were no different from ours; their corruption was even more pervasive; and their sense of political paralysis even more profound. Still, they were able to think and act anew. As we prepare to enter the next century, we believe that we are on the verge of a similar era of national renewal.

This theme is echoed in E.J. Dionne, Jr.'s *They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era*. Opening with an epigraph from Theodore Roosevelt, Dionne endorses a "New Progressivism," also inspired by Croly, whose "task is to restore the legitimacy of public life by renewing the effectiveness of government and reforming the workings of politics." This theme is frequently sounded in the pages of important liberal journals of opinion like the *New Republic* and the *American Prospect*.

But the most emphatic endorsement of such a politics is found in Michael Lind's *The Next American Nation*. Lind argues that we currently stand poised for economic and cultural renewal at the dawn of a "Fourth American Revolution." Like most of the other "progressives," Lind views the impasse of liberalism as the result of two reinforcing processes—the domination of American politics by an economic elite and the cultural and racial polarization that has fragmented the traditional constituencies of liberal democratic governance and abetted the rise of the New Right. Lind's solution: a "liberal nationalism" inspired by Hamilton and Roosevelt, which deploys the powers of the federal government in "an egalitarian assault on the unjust and inequitable political institutions" of American society. Such an assault will require "a genuine democratization of our money-dominated political system and a commitment to the kind of social-democratic reforms" supported by the New Deal alliance before its demise under the weight of inflationary racial and cultural demands.

Lind's book is the most programmatic expression of the new progressive revival. It outlines an elaborate set of policies designed to turn back the deterioration in middle-class living standards and to cement a strong reformist political coalition. Lind supports campaign finance reform; a pragmatic and flexible trade policy to replace indiscriminate free trade; immigration reform; more progressive taxation; a high-wage, technology-intensive growth industrial policy based upon tight labor markets; and strong, national reform of health care, education, and welfare. Such policies, he avers, can only succeed as part of a "war on oligarchy" that seeks to make the accumulation of private wealth compatible with overall national interests. This is an ambitious policy agenda, linked to an even more ambitious vision of national renewal. Lind proposes a virtual cultural revolution in American society, whereby Americans come to see themselves as part of a "trans-racial" nation committed to social justice, and the polarities of identity politics give way before a new sense of American national identity.

*A list of new progressives would include such writers as Robert Bellah, Alan Brinkley, Thomas Byrne Edsall, Eldon Eisenach, Jeff Faux, Stanley Greenberg, Robert Kuttner, Michael Piore, Michael Sandel, Cass Sunstein, Michael Tomasky, and Jacob Weisberg. A longer version of this essay discusses this broader literature.

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There are parallels between these new appropriations of liberal progressivism and arguments on the left about the need to revive class politics in America. Indeed, the rehabilitation of Croly among liberals is mirrored among radicals by the revival of a Gramscian project of developing a new emergent "progressive" hegemony. The most thoughtful argument to this effect has been advanced by Joel Rogers.* Rogers echoes Lind in his insistence that the renewal of American democracy requires that the "social control of the economy" must be put "back on the table of American politics." But his argument is even *more* ambitious, for it seeks to support an organized mass movement "challenging corporate power and mobilizing outside the state."

Rogers proposes a three-pronged strategy: (1) Democracy Now, a movement for citizen, worker, consumer, and taxpayer bills of rights; (2) Sustainable America, a high-wage industrial strategy based on a social tariff, full employment, and a shortened work week; (3) The New Party, "a natural electoral vehicle for a more consolidated progressive movement—a movement that itself should be built in part through greater national coordination and presence, and in larger part, in terms of organizational strategy, from the ground up."

These arguments converge on a number of claims: that the so-called "New Deal coalition" has been shattered; that the social democratic reforms of the postwar period are under siege; and that the only way to defend them and to address our social and economic problems is to rebuild a coherent liberal-left movement, and to fashion a partisan vehicle for this movement.

On the first two points it is impossible to dissent. Yet I believe that the conclusion that is drawn from them is mistaken. The policies typically supported by progressives—labor law reform, a corporatist industrial policy, a shortened work week, health care reform, welfare reform, a social tariff, public investment—are good ones. And the idea of unifying diverse constituencies around such a program is appealing. The problem with the new progressivism is not principally its desirability but its *practicality*. The reforms, and the movement-building strategy to which they are connected, are anachronistic. They constitute an effort to revive a politics of a unified "left" under conditions when this politics is no longer symbolically compelling or politically feasible.

*See Joel Rogers, "Why America Needs the New Party," *Boston Review*, vol. XVIII, no. 1 (January/February 1993), pp. 1-4; and "How Divided Progressives Might Unite," *New Left Review* (1995).

Fallacies of Progressivism

The new progressives acknowledge that today's politics cannot simply recapitulate the progressivism of the past. As Michael Piore acknowledges: "The context in which we are resurrecting social policy today is new and different from the context in which it was pursued in the past, and the institutions through which it is implemented must be different as well, even if we call them by names borrowed from the past and charge them with functionally equivalent missions." Yet I do not believe that progressives have taken the full measure of this changing context, and I question whether a meaningful response to the current challenges to democracy can so easily invoke the names and missions of the past. The progressive vision rests on a number of fallacies:

• *The Materialist Fallacy.* At the heart of the progressive revival are two beliefs: (1) that the most significant fact about American life today is the deterioration of economic conditions for the majority of citizens; and (2) that the principal cause of the conservative ascendancy has been the ability of the right to obscure these economic realities. Thus Jeff Faux maintains that the Republicans have succeeded in "diverting the economic question into a social one," and Vic Fingerhut insists that "if working and middle-income people can be conned by Republicans into thinking that this is a fight against the undeserving poor, then the Republicans can win." This theme is sounded again and again in the progressive literature—public disaffection with liberalism is due to the "cleverness" of conservatives, who have "diverted attention" from the real issues of concern to Americans, and "conned" their way into power.

But the economy is not the only issue of concern to Americans, and there is no reason to think

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that the declining middle class is the central fact of life in America today. Important, yes; morally troubling, certainly; but politically central, no.

The new progressive literature consistently fails to attend to the cultural and symbolic sources of politics. These factors are not denied; but they are treated as surface expressions of more profound issues. Faux's language is typical—these concerns are "distractions" from what is really important, the class issue. This belief is simply wrong. Acrimonious identity politics, racial antagonism, middle-class white resentment of affirmative action and "welfare," religious fundamentalism and the phenomenal mobilization of the Christian Coalition—these political formations are not distractions from what is truly real; they are what is real in American life. They cannot be dismissed, nor is there any self-evident way in which they can be transcended.

• *The Voluntarist Fallacy*. The new progressives understand that the class-based politics of the postwar period broke down under a complex set of pressures—the rise of the New Left, and of new social movements centered around race, gender, and sexuality, the partial co-optation of these movements by federal affirmative action policies, the crisis of cold war liberalism presented by the Vietnam War. Yet they view the sixties as a historical diversion. A revitalized progressivism, it is held, requires us to *get back on track*, to put the sources of cultural division behind us, and to move forward with a class-based politics.

I call this belief a *voluntarist* fallacy because it fails to acknowledge the irreversibility of history. We cannot turn back the clock on the past thirty years. This history is a record of heady triumphs—a civil rights revolution, profound and beneficial changes in gender and sexual attitudes, an inflationary discourse of rights that has protected previously marginalized groups but that has also produced its own hypocrisies, injustices, and resentments. It is also a record of disturbing and sometimes devastating setbacks—the dramatic decline in the organized labor movement, the emergence of new forms of white racism, the rise of anti-intellectualism and religious fundamentalism, and the prodigious ascent of the New Right. These triumphs and tragedies are two sides of the same coin. They are the legacies of postwar liberalism. The new progressives are voluntarists because they give no account of how these divisions can be transcended, how the legacies of the past thirty years can be gotten beyond.

Perhaps the best exploration of the difficulties new progressives have on this score is Todd Gitlin's *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked By Culture Wars*. Gitlin offers the best account of how a fractious identity politics represents both a perversion and a natural outgrowth of the New Left. Where, then, does Gitlin leave us? "While the critics of identity politics are looting society," he concludes, "the politics of identity is silent on the deepest sources of social misery: the devastation of cities, the draining of resources away from the public and into the private hands of the few. It does not organize to reduce the sickening inequality between rich and poor. Instead . . . it distracts what must be the natural constituencies of a Left if there is to be one: the poor, those fearful of being poor, intellectuals with sympathies for the excluded." Gitlin's closing injunction—"We ought to be building bridges"—is noble and compelling. But it is hard to build solid bridges on shifting soil, especially when the ground is fracturing in so many directions, and the builders weather a veritable tidal wave of opposition. And it is even harder to build a single bridge on such fractious moorings, no matter how ecumenical and flexible such a bridge might be.

The fragmentation of the left is the natural history of the past three decades. The progressive clarion is the call to summon up the will to *erase* the legacy of these decades, and to move forward. The word optimism fails to do justice to the willfulness of such a will.

• *The Rationalistic Fallacy*. The progressive belief that it is possible to erase this legacy rests in large part on another fallacy. I call this the rationalistic fallacy because progressive strategies presume that the active promotion of the "truth" about the causes of our problems will, in time, lead to "progressive," forward-looking, remedial change. This is a noble belief. Yet it is, I fear, in large part mistaken, an anachronistic residue of another, more optimistic, and more genuinely "progressive," era.

The new progressivism fails to take the full

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measure of the divorce of critical reason and effective political power. It thus vastly overstates the possibilities for the general public enlightenment that its political project presupposes. Let me briefly identify two of the principal sources of this divorce.

The first has been widely acknowledged—the insulation, professionalization, and political irrelevance of the liberal professions and of intellectuals in particular. There are, to put it simply, a limited number of venues for the promotion of the kinds of values and strategies favored by progressives.

Yet the more important cause of this divorce does not have to do with progressive intellectuals per se, but with the broader world in which they live and that they seek to affect.

Progressives are realists. They believe that they can accurately depict the world, and that their depictions can help them to alter the world. Yet in many ways the social world itself defies realism. The social world, to use a phrase coined by Jean Baudrillard, is *hyperreal*. This does not mean that there is no reality. The middle-class standard of living *has* declined. But it means that the modes of communication and experience increasingly prevalent in American society efface this reality, by juxtaposing it with other "realities," and by creating new "realities" that necessarily detract from it, and perhaps deny it.

As Benjamin Barber points out, recent developments in mass communications—advertorials, infomercials, docudramas, soap-opera-style commercials, MTV and Nickelodeon "worlds," corporate advertising, and the licensing of spin-off merchandising—work together to "blur the lines between domains once thought to be distinct," so that "the distinction between reality and virtual reality vanishes." As he writes: "distinctions of every kind are fudged: ABC places its news and sports departments under a single corporate division; television news magazines blend into entertainment programs, creating new teletabloids . . . films parade corporate logos (for a price), presidents play themselves in films . . . while dethroned governors (Cuomo and Richards) do Super Bowl commercials for snack food in which they joke about their electoral defeat, Hollywood stars run for office . . . and television pundits become practicing politicians. . . . Politicians can do no right, celebrities can do no wrong—homicide included. Nothing is quite what it seems."

Add to this the ethically anesthetizing effect of hours of television watching, for adults and, even more fatefully, for their children. And the general debasement of public discourse abetted by the rise of talk-radio and Geraldo-type live television "talk shows." Such media subject individuals to a range of contradictory images, impulses, and desires. They produce a general cynicism about and indifference to "reality"—we can always switch the channel by remote control, can't we?—and an affinity for episodic, fragmented modes of communication, like the video image-frame (infinitely erasable), and the thirty-second sound bite. Mass communications, in other words, dull political sensibilities, and help to create a mass social *irrealism*.

My point is not epistemological; it is *sociological*. The concerns that are central to progressives must compete with myriad other concerns that are no less pressing, and that are often *more* pressing, to most Americans. In a "hyperreal" world there is economic suffering, and it is surely important to call attention to it, and to fight against it. It is surely possible, and desirable, to organize citizens around many of the issues promoted by progressives. Yet it is difficult to imagine a *mass* politics organized around such concerns. For the facts, theories, and moral sensibilities to which progressives typically appeal necessarily fight a steeply uphill battle against the indifference, cynicism, and attention deficit disorder of American mass culture.

• *The Historicist Fallacy*. On some level most progressives know this. Yet the pessimism of their intellects does not chasten their wills. This is due in part to a sincere commitment to egalitarian values. But equally important is the historical narrative from which they draw their sustenance.

To speak of progressivism is to invoke a philosophy of history, according to which the passage of time and the development of technological and organizational capacity is associated with human betterment. Progressivism is optimistic about the future, and about our ability to master it. Progressives face adversity but they insist that adversity cannot last and that it must eventually give way to good fortune. This is a common re-

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frain. Thus Piore insists that Republican economic policy is "a prescription for a continuous decline in the standard of living . . . for a sizable portion of the lower end of the income distribution. In such a situation the social tensions. . . would only be the beginning of a series of upheavals that would eventually lead to revolt and rebellion, if not forestalled by legislative restrictions." It is not Piore's prognosis that I question. If Republican policies are adopted—and there is a good chance that in some version they will be adopted, though perhaps by Democrats—then the standard of living of many Americans *will* decline. But it does not follow from this that the immiseration that might occur would lead to widespread rebellion that could only be forestalled by coercive means. *This* judgment, I would suggest, falls in the realm of prophecy. Suffering may or may not lead to protest, but there is an enormous gulf separating discrete acts of protest from an accumulation of protests sufficient to provoke "legislative restrictions." Yet the rhetorical effect of Piore's formulation is to suggest that current trends can only result in two possibilities, either discontent and repression or progressive social reform. Indeed, what seem like two possibilities are in fact a single one, since both scenarios involve an escalation of class conflict and a pressure for social change that can only be abated by the triumph of a progressive agenda.

The most explicit statement of this theme is provided by Mark Levinson in a *Dissent* essay (Fall 1995) entitled "Looking Backward: The Republican Revolution." Levinson presents an imaginary dialogue between a reporter and a *Dissent* editor sometime in the early twenty-first century. The editor explains to the reporter why the Republican Revolution of the mid-1990s was a passing phenomenon that grew increasingly unpopular as the years passed by, and he recounts how a growing mass movement, centered around a revitalized AFL-CIO, emerged to contest Republican policy and advance a program called Democracy 2000. The program of Levinson's imaginary "Democracy 2000" *is* the program of current progressives. In Levinson's account: "Candidates signed on to it, and unions and community organizations ran grassroots campaigns of support. In a way, it was modeled on the Contract With America, but it had more popular support than the Contract." Levinson presents this, of course, as a utopian fantasy, but he does so in all earnestness. The scenario he imagines is the scenario imagined by most current progressives, who reason that the status quo can only produce unhappiness and resistance, and that only a progressive movement can remedy the political crisis bound to follow.

The progressive argument, then, recapitulates a common refrain that can be traced back to Marx and to Hegel before him—that there is a dynamic of change built into the current order of things, that the unresolved difficulties of the present give history a progressive tendency or directionality. Yet, as Michael Walzer suggested in the Winter 1996 *Dissent*: "the various social catastrophes looming in the mind of the left—millions of men and women begging in the streets, the destruction of the black middle-class and the disappearance of black students from elite universities, massive environmental pollution, a surge in industrial accidents, and so on—are probably not going to happen, at least not on the expected scale. A long, dreary, and dispiriting decline in all these areas is more likely than a dramatic crash."

• *The Historical Fallacy*. What these various weaknesses in the new progressivism add up to is a seriously questionable reading of the historical moment.

Consider the Progressive era itself, the touchstone for most of these writers. The Progressives instituted a series of important reforms: they effected a transformation of American liberalism, away from a neo-Jeffersonian distrust of state power toward an active reformism based on a robust federal government. There is much to admire here. And yet if we pause for but a sketchy comparison between the Progressive era and our own, it will be clear how different the next American century must be:

(1) While Progressivism drew force from an ascendant liberal Protestantism, today the most politically mobilized religious force in America—the Christian Coalition—is on the far right.

(2) Progressive public discourse was sup-

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ported by an active, reformist, muckraking journalism for which there is simply no current analogue, much though people like Dionne try; and the mass media today function to deaden serious ethical conviction rather than to nourish it.

(3) Progressive reforms were supported by a growing faith in the power of science—scientific management, administrative science, educational science—connected to the emergence and ascendancy of the modern research university. Yet neither science nor the university today has this kind of credibility or this kind of reformist ambition; and the social sciences today are thoroughly specialized, anesthetized, and insulated from broader currents of political argument and social reform.

(4) The age of Progressivism was the age of a growing labor movement, while the labor movement today is in serious and possibly terminal decline.

(5) Progressive reforms were functionally compatible with, and in some sense required by, the form of corporate capitalism that was evolving at the turn of the last century. Yet the interests once served by the national-corporate form of regulation have now transcended the boundaries of the nation-state. The form of "flexible accumulation" that is ascendant requires neither a strong collective bargaining agent—a union movement—nor the same kinds of social and economic regulation. It is, in other words, in many ways *destructive* of progressive types of social and economic policy.

(6) Progressivism was made possible by the flourishing of a variety of radical movements in American society to the left of the Progressives, including the International Workers of the World, the remnants of turn of the century Populism, and a Socialist party that, under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs, had a significant electoral and an even more significant cultural presence. The Progressive movement, and the reforms that it instituted, was in large part an effort to *co-opt* these political forces. Yet American politics today is mobilized to the right rather than the left. As a result there does not exist anything remotely resembling the kind of political pressure that gave impetus to earlier efforts at social reform.

This is not to say that social movements are impossible or that specific reform efforts are futile. It is simply to say that there are no good reasons to believe that it is possible to recreate a current day analogue of earlier progressive movements. Current conditions make the recreation of a coherent, mass-based progressive movement of social reform highly unlikely.

What Is To Be Done?

Surely something should be done to remedy the serious problems befalling American society and to address the deteriorating legitimacy of its democratic politics. Yet I would suggest that the question of "what is to be done?" is itself an anachronism of an earlier political era. It presumes that there is a unified political subject to whom this question can be posed. But there is no core issue around which a mass progressive constituency might readily be forged. And there is no way that the many problems confronting American society can be remedied through a single democratic agency.

At its heart the progressive vision suffers from a typically modernist faith in the powers of collective action, a faith shared by liberal progressives like Croly and Marxist progressives like Gramsci. As Croly insisted: "In this country the solution of the social problem demands the substitution of conscious social ideal for the earlier instinctive homogeneity of the American nation," and "a vigorous and conscious assertion of the public as opposed to private and special interests." *The Promise of American Life* presents a powerful vision of a strong, national government exercising public power for public purposes. It expresses an infectious optimism, and offers a powerful antidote to the conservative Jeffersonianism that held back reform in the late nineteenth century, and that today threatens the reforms of the twentieth. And yet it is impossible to share this optimism. Think about the achievements it has produced—a robust if limited public sector; an extraordinary physical infrastructure of railways, roads, sewers, and public utilities; and an equally impressive cultural infrastructure of schools, museums, and public parks. Think of the cities that owe their phenomenal growth in the twentieth century to this progressivism. They are truly an impressive legacy, even if they did not "solve" the social problem

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in America. But they are all in various stages of decomposition, increasingly the sources of our problems rather than the means of their solution. And the spirit of progressive reform has given way to a spirit of cynicism not simply about the power but about the very meaning of collective purpose.

The progressive vision of conscious purpose, in short, seems to have reached its tragic denouement. It is not clear that there is any way beyond this state of affairs, and there is surely no reason for optimism of any sort.

In April of 1995 Robert Reich published an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* entitled "Drowning in the Second Wave." A critique of the Republican Contract With America, the essay calls for a renewed federal commitment to rebuild the "human capital" of American workers so that they can compete in the global marketplace. Only then, Reich insists, will Americans be poised to ride the rising tide of "third wave" technologies and the opportunities they present. Reich is one of the few remaining "progressives" in the Clinton White House, and his argument epitomizes the progressive vision. Yet Reich's aspirations have come to naught. The reason, it seems to me, is simple. What if American society is not drowning in the second wave but *drowning in the third wave*? What if the tidal wave of change that is currently taking place is overwhelming? What, in other words, if there is a profound and irremediable disjuncture between our difficulties and the powers available to us for their remedy?

In an article for *Dissent* written after the 1994 elections (Spring 1995), I wrote that "the weakness of genuinely democratic agencies should lead us indeed to a pessimism of the intellect, but also to a tempering of the will. Only a more modest, localist democracy now makes sense in America." By localist democracy I meant the opposite of a *totalizing* strategy of social reform or transformation, of a new "hegemony," whether this be the hegemony of Lind's "progressive liberal nationalism" or Rogers's "progressive left."

This idea of localist democracy is not parochial. To insist that democratic responses to our problems must be partial is perfectly consistent with a general, "global" understanding of how things fit together; and it is equally consistent with all kinds of regional, national, and even transnational forms of organization. It simply refuses to imagine that these organizations can or should be all-encompassing or that their projects will eventually converge on a common program of social change. A localist democracy, then, is only localist in the metaphoric sense, not in the geographic one. Further, the reasons for localist democracy are pragmatic rather than dogmatic. It is not out of allegiance to the rhetoric of Jefferson that localist democracy recommends itself, nor is it out of a hostility toward reform; it is because the conditions that once supported "progressive" politics have been altered, and the prospects for a revitalization of progressivism are dim.

Neither is localist democracy complacent. We cannot afford to throw up our hands and do nothing in response to the pressing problems before us. But neither do I think that there is any single strategy that might encompass the range of practical responses to these problems.

What, then, does this view of localist democracy mean in practice? I can only furnish some examples. They do not converge on an overarching vision of social change. Neither do they constitute an exhaustive sampling of the possible forms "localist democracy" might take. Yet each represents a viable form of democratic response to contemporary challenges.

(1) *The Algebra Project.* Founded in 1982 by Bob Moses, a former leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the project seeks to help poor, at-risk students acquire math literacy and basic learning skills by creating a supportive network of parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. The project has been adopted by over one hundred schools across the country. In her recent book *Reclaiming Democracy*, Mehta Mendel-Reyes suggests that the Algebra Project represents an abandonment of Moses's earlier vision of "participatory democracy," and that its narrow focus on math education is inconsistent with broader themes of democratic empowerment. Yet it is also possible to view the project as an eminently pragmatic approach to democratic empowerment, which attacks a specific problem of math illiteracy

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through specific pedagogic solutions, involving local communities in a way that seeks to promote a sense of efficacy and to make a difference in childrens' lives. Such activities address practical concerns, they resist the deteriorating conditions besetting the poor, and they promote loose networks of common concern and commitment. They are modest, but they are also potentially effective.

(2) *Community organizations, such as the Association of Communities Organized for Reform (ACORN), the Industrial Areas Foundation, and the Citizen Action Coalition.* Such organizations do not constitute a "backyard revolution" if we mean by this that they represent the seeds of a general and dramatic transformation of American society. But they are vital ways through which citizens can address specific difficulties, such as urban decay, affordable housing, or crime, by harnessing existing, albeit limited, community resources. Groups such as these help to organize local community development through the promotion of political skills, and they furnish national networks of organizers and activists that share information and strategy.

(3) *The movement for environmental justice*, which began as a series of local responses to toxic waste disposal problems and blossomed into a broad-based movement organized around issues of class, gender, and race, has heightened public awareness about environmental concerns, raised the cost of corporate negligence, and created an extensive network of organizing and information-sharing. The environmental justice movement has not transformed American capitalism or effected an overarching vision of progressive reform. But it has profoundly shaped public discourse and provided outlets for civic responsibility.

(4) *The new economic networks* that have recently been organized—largely by unions—in response to the globalization of capital and the new system of "flexible accumulation." Such networks monitor national and transnational investment and the environmental impact of such investment, track wages and the human rights of workers, and provide solidarity and support across state and local boundaries. One example of such a network is the coalition of groups, in the United States, Mexico, and Canada that recently developed to challenge the North American Free Trade Agreement. Another would be the Workers' Rights Boards that have been formed by Jobs With Justice in Cleveland, Boston, Buffalo, and Vermont, which hear worker complaints and have instituted informal mediation processes involving local civic, religious, business, and labor leaders to resolve such grievances. These networks do not constitute a wholesale alternative to corporate power. As Hilary Wainwright has argued: "They have been formed primarily as networks of resistance. . . [and] they exist only in the nooks and crannies of the capitalist edifice. Where they lack the support of some public institution or independent foundation they have a very precarious existence."* Yet they represent important forms of collective action and democratic empowerment. While they recognize the global economic sources of many pressing problems, and while they abjure parochial solutions, they represent *partial* ways of addressing these problems, ways of resisting adversity without seeking fully to conquer it.

Hannah Arendt once described democratic forms of praxis as "islands in a sea or as oases in a desert." In a social world inhospitable to democratic awareness, agency, and empowerment, forms of civic engagement that *do* promote awareness, agency, and empowerment are like oases—rare, isolated phenomena, perpetually threatened by the encroachment of the desert, in danger of being drained of life, or simply of being overwhelmed by the heat.

This, I think, is an apt metaphor for the future of democracy in America. The prevailing forces in our society and in our world are damaging to democracy, both in the advantages they distribute to some and in the problems they distribute to most. These problems are accumulating just as the capacity to master them in a coherent way is diminishing. Democrats facing the twenty-first century confront, to use the language of Walter Lippmann, a world of drift that they

* Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free Market Right* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), p. 153.

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cannot master. There is difficulty, and there is disorientation aplenty, but there is also a dearth of constructive political energy and a surplus of ill-will and resentment.

This is not a cause for despair, for there are democratic energies, and there are vehicles for them. But these energies, and their vehicles, offer little hope for large-scale, progressive social reform. The progressive vision of social intelligence and social policy is simply too ambitious. Local elections can be won by "progressives." And local initiatives can have an accumulating impact on public awareness and public policy. But the project of marshalling a new hegemony is anachronistic, and is not likely to succeed in constructing a new regime of public policy or in mastering the problems confronting us. What I have called initiatives in "localist democracy" are surely insufficient to this task. They cannot help us to master our difficulties, and citizens who engage them are bound to be frustrated. But it may well be that we ought to give up the hope of mastering our difficulties, and settle simply for resisting them as best we can.

In Albert Camus's novel *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux, the heroic leader of the resistance, is asked what gives him the confidence to persist in his action. "I've no more," he responds, "than the pride that's needed to keep me going. I have no idea what's awaiting me, or what will happen when this all ends. For the moment I know this: there are sick people and they need curing." The world, he avers, is shaped by death; and our victories on behalf of life are always temporary, always fragile. Yet this "is no reason," he maintains, "for giving up the struggle."

American democracy faces severe challenges. I do not think that we can in good faith confront the next century with the same optimism, and ambition, with which Progressives confronted the one that is now ending. The kinds of democratic responses that are likely to be effective are bound to be partial, limiting, fractious, and in many ways unsatisfying. They are likely to disappoint our modernist quest for mastery and our progressive faith in the future. Yet it is the great virtue of democracy as a form of politics that it prizes contingency, for politics is nothing else but the Sisyphean task of constructing provisional solutions to our unmasterable difficulties. □

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RESPONSES

E.J. Dionne Jr.

In his fine book on Hannah Arendt and Albert Camus, Jeffrey Isaac makes an entirely convincing case that one can respect the tragic aspect of political action without losing hope in its possibilities. Perhaps it's because Jeff Isaac has so influenced my view that I now find myself considerably less pessimistic than he is about our current situation.

He is broadly right in a number of his criticisms of the progressive (or is it neoprogressive?) outlook. But I think he misses the extent to which progressives, liberals, and social democrats may already have begun to move away from some of the errors he ascribes to them.

For example, he argues that "the new progressive literature consistently fails to attend to the cultural and symbolic sources of politics." It's true that some on the left try to reduce everything to economics and pretend that other questions—race, culture, crime, welfare—are "distractions." But that is no longer the rule. If anything, the tendency among progressives (especially those running for public office) is to highlight the connections between economic questions and social and moral questions—connections I tried to make in my book *They Only Look Dead*—while also accepting that, for most citizens, the moral and cultural spheres have both autonomy and integrity. It's quite clear, for example, that parents worry about the messages the culture is sending their children and about their children's safety in school and on the streets. But they also worry *at the same time* about whether they will earn enough to support their families. The left is foolish if it ignores the first set of worries, but the right often ignores the second. Progressives have finally started to notice that there are links between the two.

Similarly, Isaac is right in saying that it's not enough for neoprogressives to declare that the wars over race, gender, and sexuality are over and to assume that the country will miraculously "get back on track" with class politics. Isaac goes on to cite Todd Gitlin's fine book *The Twilight of Common Dreams* and notes Gitlin's noble call to build bridges instead of digging cultural trenches. Isaac says, "It's hard to build solid bridges on shifting soil." Of course that's true. But Gitlin's book is itself a sign that neoprogressives are not pretending that the culture wars have suddenly ended, but instead are working actively to find a settlement that roots pluralism in universal values. It's hard work, but people such as Gitlin are trying to get it done.

Isaac speaks of the ways in which "mass communications . . . dull political sensibilities, and help to create mass social *irrealism*." (His emphasis.) Well, sure, sometimes. But it's simply not true that Americans have been anesthetized by this "mass social *irrealism*." On the contrary, it's quite clear that there is widespread worry about declining living standards, and that this worry had a political effect even in this year's *Republican* primaries. And reform is in the air even within the mass media. The debate stirred by the "civic journalism" movement and the substantial response to James Fallows's recent book on journalism are signs of at least a modest effort to reassert the civic and democratic responsibilities of those engaged in "mass communications."

Isaac is right in pointing to the problems raised for progressive politics by the decline of the progressive churches and the problems of the trade union movement. (I might point to the signs of revival in both spheres, but won't risk looking Panglossian by pushing the point too hard.) And nobody can argue with Isaac's criticism of the idea that history is inexorably on the side of a progressive transformation. I do believe that the pressures created by global economic competition and a popular desire for a greater sense of social fairness and personal opportunity point more toward progressive politics rather than to-

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ward a rendezvous with radical *laissez-faire*. But that is a view rooted in a particular analysis, not in a historicist faith. Those who claim to be on the side of history are usually disappointed.

But if anyone should be disappointed by history at this juncture, it is those conservatives who thought only eighteen months ago that they had arrived at the Finland Station destined to lead a successful revolution to demolish the "liberal welfare state" and push the center-left into oblivion. (Right-wing Leninism turns out to be as flawed as its left-wing variant.) At the very least, it can now be said that the progressive idea and the basic underpinnings of the social insurance state enjoy much deeper support than either optimistic conservatives or dispirited liberals and social democrats once believed.

And are not the "localist" initiatives Isaac describes signs that our time may not be as "inhospitable to democratic awareness, agency and empowerment" as Isaac asserts? Why should such initiatives be purely local phenomena? Why is it not reasonable to ask national political institutions and the broader culture to lend them support? In fact, many of the "local" efforts Isaac describes grew out of national movements. So it was with the original Progressive movement, which grew nationally and locally at the same time.

Isaac is right to warn progressives of the dangers involved in seeing everything in economic terms, in pretending that their victory is ineluctable, in highlighting national action to the exclusion of local and decentralized initiative. He is right to see the decline of popular confidence in "experts" as making this time very different from the original Progressive Era. He is especially right in warning against the hubris of assuming that politics can offer any person or any movement total mastery. But reformist politics is not about mastery. The reformer's faith is more modest. It is a belief that democratic political action can lead to gradual social improvement through steady work. I see no reason to give up on that.

Mark Levinson

When I read Jeff Isaac I fell into depression. Twenty years of my life—and thousands of others'—wasted! In the depth of my despair, however, I had a revelation. Isaac was right. "A new 'activist public policy,' centered around the problems of a post-industrial economy and the decline of middle-class living standards . . . is anachronistic . . . . Democrats who wish to address the serious problems confronting American liberal democracy" need to think, and act, "in a different way."

This was no time to be depressed. There were so many people who didn't recognize the "fallacies" on which their beliefs were based. Surely if they knew of Isaac's argument, they would not waste their time trying to build a progressive movement. They would work on local projects. It became my mission to spread Isaac's word.

I went to a local union meeting. A group of workers were discussing how to organize a coalition to support a program of low interest rates, stronger economic growth, public investment, a jobs program, labor-law reform, an increase in the minimum wage. The workers thought this would begin to reverse twenty years of declining wages and increasing inequality.

These people had not read Isaac, so they did not know about the *materialist fallacy*. These workers actually believed that one of the most significant political facts of the moment is that three-quarters of the workforce has experienced declining wages for twenty years. They naively thought that it would make political sense for the Democratic party to appeal to the economic interest of the majority of Americans.

I patiently told them that while declining wages are important, what is "*truly real*" in American life is "acrimonious identity politics, racial antagonism, middle-class white resentment of affirmative action and welfare, religious fundamentalism, and the phenomenal mobilization of the Christian Coalition."

One of them said, "Of course that's real. But

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let me tell you what else is real. I can't sleep at night because if I lose my job—and a lot of my friends have—I'm in the street. I have no savings and a pile of debt. I'm scared. I thought Clinton had the right idea in 1992 when he got elected on a platform of putting people first. But once in office he implemented the economic policy of George Bush. All he talks about is reducing the deficit, NAFTA, and how well the bond and stock markets responded to his program. Well, whoop-de-do. Whatever happened to putting people first? When hundreds of my co-workers were laid off, they blamed Clinton. Many got new jobs, but they pay less, and they have no health insurance or pensions. Most of these people voted Republican in 1994—believe me it's not because they like Newt Gingrich—and for Pat Buchanan in 1996. There is a lot of insecurity and anger in this country. If there's no political program to unite people, this anger and insecurity will take ugly forms."

Blinded by their own material conditions these workers couldn't see the materialist fallacy. I tried another tack.

"I'm very sympathetic to what you're saying, but according to Jeff Isaac your politics are based on the *voluntarist fallacy*. You don't 'acknowledge the irreversibility of history.' The civil rights revolution, changes in gender and sexual attitudes, coupled with the decline of the labor movement, new forms of racism, and so on have created permanent schisms. You 'give no account of how these divisions can be transcended.' "

Another worker laughed. "That is simply wrong. Everyone knows that race and cultural issues have pushed key constituencies away from the Democrats. The question is: why haven't liberals pursued economic policies that would keep them together? It's not as if this is a new issue. Jeff Faux recently pointed out that during World War II there were white race riots in cities that voted overwhelmingly Democratic. In 1948 Harry Truman desegregated the armed forces—a much bigger step at the time than permitting gays to remain in the military in 1993. Yet the white working class voted Democratic because Roosevelt and Truman were seen as being on the workers' side in the struggle over economic security."

I wasn't getting very far with these workers. So I tried to explain what Isaac meant by the *rationalist fallacy*.

"Look," I said, "the problem with your program is that it 'vastly overstates the possibilities for the general public enlightenment.' "

"What?"

"There's this guy named Jean Baudrillard, and he says that we live in a hyperreal society. It means, according to Isaac, 'that the modes of communication and experience increasingly prevalent in American society efface this reality, by juxtaposing it with other "realities," and by creating new "realities" that necessarily detract from it, and perhaps deny it.' "

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

"I'll try and put it in plain English. You and your co-workers watch television and you are undoubtedly influenced by commercials. As a result you probably suffer from what Isaac calls the 'attention deficit disorder of American mass culture.' "

"Listen, buddy" (they were starting to get angry), "I'm still not sure I understand what you're saying, but to the extent that I do, I don't like it. You either have faith in the capacities of people or you don't. If you don't, you deny the moral basis of our democracy. I suppose guys like Isaac can see through the hyperreality, while morons like us can't."

I didn't know how to respond. I thought he had a good point, so I tried to change the subject.

"I want you to understand we are really on the same side. It's just that Jeff Isaac has convinced me you're wasting your time trying to create a progressive movement at the national level. Your politics are based on *historical and historicist fallacies*. You don't understand how different the current period is from the Progressive Era, and you believe 'that there is a dynamic of change built into the current order of things, that the unresolved difficulties of the present give history a progressive tendency or directionality.'"

"I think we understand all too well how different this period is from the past and I certainly don't think that there is anything inevitable about the direction of change. The difference between us is that you and Professor

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Isaac appear to think that history ended with the 1994 elections. You think we can't change things in this country and I think we can."

It was clear that these workers didn't understand. I decided to explain Isaac's argument to members of a community organization that had an office in the same building as the union. This group organized citizens around local issues such as getting roads paved and fighting to get the neighborhood its just share of government money for housing and job training. I explained to them that "the progressive vision of conscious purpose" has "reached its tragic denouement," and that "only a more modest, localist democracy now makes sense in America."

To my surprise they reacted like . . . the trade unionists! One of them said, "We are community organizers because that is what we do best. But unless we build a movement to confront the inequities in our economic arrangements and the undemocratic nature of corporate power, our work is doomed to be ineffectual. What we do should not be counterposed to that of the union activists. Our activities complement each other."

Isaac's arguments weren't persuasive. I was beginning to question my revelation. Perhaps Isaac was wrong.

Jane Mansbridge

I agree with many parts of Jeff Isaac's argument, and particularly with his list of ways in which our current era differs from that of the Progressives. I agree too with the general thrust of his presumptions—that we must invest ourselves in local initiatives that work. Compared to the most progressive countries in the world, the United States has often made its best, most innovative, longest lasting contributions through decentralization. Local initiative is one of our most useful cultural specializations: let's exploit it.

But look, folks, it's an election year. Now is the time to come to the aid of the DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

Yes, the old Democratic party. And the PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN! No matter what your level of cynicism about party politics, no matter what your disagreements with the president's attempts to out-Republican the Republicans, you have to recognize that in 1996 the thing that will make the greatest difference to working people all over the United States is to elect a Democratic rather than a Republican president. The thing that will make the next greatest difference is to bring in a Democratic Congress. Every vote in Congress will count, on a lot of different bills.

We don't have the discipline among our activists in the United States that we see in Europe. A lot of activists there—in Sweden, Germany, even Italy—know that at times (I'm talking *episodic* here; this isn't the CP), what's best for the whole collective is swallowing your disagreements—and I mean major, heavy-duty disagreements—and working together to get one important thing done.

This election is that one important thing.

So, if the question is, "What Is to Be Done?" the answer is: work your butt off in the election.

Those who don't agree, read on. Those who agree, or are reading this after the election, skip to "Why national *or* local?"

Do You Still Need To Be Convinced?

After the civil rights revolution and the backlash of the Reagan revolution, which together politicized the Circuit Court level of the federal judiciary, it has become crucial who appoints the judges of this country. Like it or not, we are living in a world in which large numbers of issues are settled in the courts. Another term of appointments subject to veto by the radical right would close the judicial route to progressive change for a generation.

I can think of dozens of issues on which I opposed the policy President Clinton pushed through. On several I was bitterly, deeply opposed. But he did also get through changes like these: a raise in the earned income tax credit, which helps every single one of the working poor

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every day; more progressive income tax rates; "motor-voter" registration; the Family and Medical Leave Act, which guarantees employment on return from a medical- or family-related absence; the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act; the Brady Bill for handguns and an assault weapons ban; increased funding for school districts with many poor children, for Head Start, for WIC, for battered women's shelters, for the homeless, for housing, and for legal services; increased AIDS public health services; repeal of the abortion counseling "gag rule"; repeal of the ban on importing RU-486; and more aggressive enforcement of the NLRA unfair labor practices prohibitions, OSHA violations of workplace safety, the Environmental Protection Act, and equal opportunity complaints.*

Do you think any one of those policies would have been put through by a Republican president or a Republican Congress?

Clinton has been deeply, deeply handicapped by never having—even in the first half of his term—a strong Democratic majority in Congress. In the more recent half of his term he had a *Republican* Congress. This is not, as we know, what Kennedy or Johnson (or FDR, or even Carter) had to work with. Given that, he still made choices you and I thought were wrong. That is not what we need to focus on now. We can't engage in mild pessimism, major pessimism—or any contemplation of our own moods—now. We just need to work for a Democratic victory, both in Congress and the presidency.

There is a time for everything. This month is a time for giving money to the Democratic party, offering to help at party headquarters, working with any grassroots group you're involved in to get out the vote—and trying to bring some sense into the head of any friend who thinks that this election won't make a difference.

Why National *or* Local?

The election over, the very experimental logic that inspires Jeff Isaac—to turn to the (metaphorically) local level, the programs that work, the incremental strategy—ought to apply as well to the (metaphorically) national level. Why not try out new ideas and visions even when they are unifying or national in scope?

None of us can know what moment we're in. Let John Judis and Michael Lind, E.J. Dionne and Joel Rogers cast their visions before us and everyone else. They're wrong, undoubtedly, about some specifics of the Progressive analogy. And they are also undoubtedly wrong when (which is not always) they look only nationally, or to a mass-based movement, for an answer. But, as Isaac says, the policies they propose are typically good. Some of their ideas might work. And if, improbable as it is, some vision and some set of spokespeople came together with some set of historical accidents to produce a movement that looked like a "unified 'left,'" many of us would carp and protest, but we would be buoyed by that moment in history and swept forward again as unpredictably as we were in the sixties. Why not cast many visions upon the waters, and see which ones float?

In the long run I am more than mildly pessimistic. In particular, I note Isaac's point that many Progressive-era reforms were instituted only because they helped corporate capitalism. Maybe on some matters progressives can't get anywhere without the support of important sectors of capital. This is Peter Swenson's argument, based on the experience of the U.S. New Deal and the Swedish social democratic welfare state (including its core legislation and its original solidaristic wage policy, all supported by the export-oriented sectors of Swedish capital).** If progressive reform needs capitalist support, then progressives need to think hard about what policies can attract support from what kinds of capitalists, and what institutional mechanisms might help these capitalists discover that those reforms are in their interest.

Although I don't like it, the nation has become, in the years since the Progressives, even more dependent on national-level decisions. Globalization has been accompanied by the

*For these and more, see Richard Rothstein's "Friends of Bill?" *American Prospect* No. 20 (Winter 1995), pp. 32-41.

**Peter Swenson, "Bringing Capital Back In," *World Politics* 43 (1991), pp. 513-44, and "Arranged Alliance," *Politics and Society* (forthcoming early 1997).

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growth of international organizations, whose negotiations require representation from nations as nations. The post-Progressive era Great Depression let everyone know that the economy, stupid, needs national direction. (And Clinton's electorate responded to that knowledge in 1992.) The nation's courts make decisions, like *Roe v. Wade*, that change the context of personal life at one swoop. How many immigrants we admit has to be a national-level decision. Progressives can't ignore the hard decisions at the national level or the need for as much unity as we can muster at that level.

Isaac is right in saying we can't go back to the Progressives' moment. He is wrong in saying the only way to respond is partial, giving up the search for a unifying and purposive, symbolically accessible, common vision.

So let us keep reading Dick Flacks and Ronnie Dugger, Judis, Lind, Dionne, and Rogers, and keep supporting the New Party as well as the Coalition for New Priorities. Out of the mix may come the partial, limiting, fractious, and unsatisfying, but practical, brew that is right for 2000 and beyond. And because fortune is fickle, out of it might even come the fragments we can weave into a vision that will appeal far beyond the readership of *Dissent*, but that will still unify some of us, sometimes.

Joel Rogers

Jeff Isaac believes contemporary progressives face serious new problems of program and agency: identifying "what is to be done" to advance egalitarian democratic values under present economic and social conditions, and finding someone to do it. Sharing these values with Isaac, I agree with him that we need a new strategy to realize them. We disagree on what that strategy should be.

To begin with our common problem. We need to figure out policies and organizational forms appropriate to a changed world: where the nation state is less capable of directing the economy within its borders; where solving supply-side and regulatory problems is essential to citizen well-being; where traditional productivist politics is qualified by concern about such "non-economic" issues as the environment or gender; where "the working class" and "the family" and "black people" and other building blocks of progressive agency are not unambiguous, homogeneous, or stable terms. As nobody knows just what those new policies and organizational forms are, moreover, finding them will require social experiment and learning—so we also need to build the organizational routines and supports for that. Steady work indeed.

As to how to do that work, Isaac believes "new progressives" don't have much to say—or that what they have to say is too ambitious or totalizing. He thinks that I and others suffer many fallacies of belief: that the only thing people care about is cash; that social differences don't create problems of political will; that speaking truth to power will make power roll over; that things are sure to get better since they have to; that all late nineties, whether eighteen or nineteen, are basically the same. I don't believe any of these things, so I guess I'm on the wrong list. Or maybe the list is wrong. But leaving Isaac's characterization of others aside, what's he got to offer?

"Localist democracy." Not understood geographically, mind you, much less as Jeffersonian ideology, but as a "chastening" of democratic ambition. Isaac recommends no new organizational strategy or program, but attitude adjustment: a forsaking of big-think and especially big-organization think; a recognition that we will never all agree on everything we think it important to have agreement on, and therefore never on any ambitious common project.

I find this either uselessly abstract or simply wrong—in any case not promising as political strategy.

On social organization, Isaac abjures both localism in economic governance and broad agreement on public accountability and program. But at a time when additional local capacity is needed to solve problems beyond the reach of

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the nation state, and when the dangers of economic inequality and political particularism and inequality are growing, this seems exactly the wrong approach. Take economic development. Any progressive strategy should aim to close off the low road of "downsizing" and "restructuring" and help pave the high road, a two-step strategy that requires holding economic practice to higher standards than at present and building the range of public goods—training, modernization, new regulatory regimes, more competent worker organization—needed to enable firms to meet them under competitive conditions. Doing this requires developing institutions both highly attuned to local economic practice and its variation and able—consider the "tradeoffs" commonly alleged between environmentally sustainable development and job growth—to overcome traditional issue divisions through practices reconciling their respective concerns.

A natural place to begin such a strategy is in our neglected metropolitan regions, which already hold within them the key ingredients of a high-wage, low-waste, more democratically-ordered economy. But without some framework of national standards and coordination, one region's economic success is another's loss. So the organizational beginnings of an alternative here would aim both to build relevant local capacity (the "localism" in which Isaac places so little hope) and guard against issue and interest factionalism within and across those locales (the "common program" he rejects as well).

On program, if Isaac thinks of "chastening" as something like reformism or muddling through—well, that's an old mixed bag that he doesn't help sort. Some problems are tractable to stand-alone or partial solutions, others require coordination across diverse issue areas or more radical effort. We could use some distinctions here. We could also use some new technique—for example, to support governance strategies more nuanced and diverse than the "live free or die" choice between markets and public hierarchies on which public debate remains transfixed. And we can always use some new ideas—on finding the money to support needed public goods, or restructuring the welfare state to enhance popular support, or modernizing our industrial base, or making government accountable. Such institutional and policy innovation is higher on my list than attitude adjustment.

Finally, on the feasibility and attraction of large progressive projects, I flatly disagree. Of course we're doomed if we make agreement on everything a condition of moving together on anything, or if we require that everyone agree on something before we try to do it. But on these terms, democratic forces also would have been doomed in the 1960s, 1930s, 1890s, and 1860s, not to mention 1776. Of course we're divided at present. But that division is not just cause, but consequence, of the absence of an articulate mass program. Any successful political project creates conditions of its own advance—often by creating a new social subject through declaration of that presumptive subject's aims. You don't just find an agent of new politics: a working class, a civil rights constituency, a cosmopolitan public. You make it, in part by declaring that politics.

As to the proposition—offered in the face of titanic corporate mobilization, the Christian Right, and all the rest—that the chief problem of American progressives is that they strive too insistently for unity and scale . . . well, words fail me.

The fact is, large and overlapping portions of our currently disorganized public regularly declare themselves willing to support a new progressive program—yes, a program recognizing this world's difference from the 1930s—if currently divided progressives united to offer them one. The fact is, that to be seen and supported by the public in this media-distracted and organizationally divided culture, that offer needs to be made at some enduring scale. Fact is, relevant scale and accessibility require organization, pooling of resources, some breaking with present routines—preeminently in progressive strategies, or the lack thereof, regarding electoral politics. Fact is, the groups and individuals who agree on all this separately have among them the resources needed to make that happen; the task is to get them to act together, to join those resources, to become more rather than less than the sum of their divided parts. Not suffering from the "moral fallacy" that because this should be done it will be done, I think we'd be crazy not to try.

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Sean Wilentz

When Jeffrey Isaac calls for chastened political expectations, I can't help but agree. Given the political blockages and intellectual disarray of the moment, who wouldn't? As I write this, in early July, the *New York Times* reports that federal cutbacks may necessitate the partial privatization of the National Park Service—one of the most successful and least controversial legacies of the original Progressives. If the parks cannot be sustained in the name of the common good, what can? At moments like these, the old spirit of Progressivism seems as dead as a doornail. But then again, I have my better moments, too—when I think about Newt Gingrich's astonishing fall from public grace or about the growing divisions within what once looked like an impregnable Republican coalition.

Of course, the political situation now is worse, in some respects, than it was in, say, 1910, when radicalism and reform crackled across the headlines. But in other respects things are at least as hopeful now as they were then—something Isaac suggests when he talks in passing of more recent liberal triumphs. Think of the United States at the time of the original Progressives—when formal segregation was the rule in much of the country; the Ku Klux Klan was on the rise; women did not have the vote; academia and the so-called liberal professions were bulwarks of smug gentility; right-wing fundamentalism was gathering strength; the rise of communism and fascism was just around the corner; and the labor movement, although full of spirit, was about to suffer a series of disastrous and bloody defeats that would leave it looking moribund by the 1920s.

As for the present: hasn't the Christian Coalition, for all of its power, caused great difficulty inside the Republican party? Is the muckraking impulse gone (or is it limited now *strictly* to sex scandals)? If the mass media serve the interests of the powers-that-be so faithfully, why do conservatives loathe the media so? With writers like many of those whom Isaac cites—not to mention Theda Skocpol, Paul Starr, William Julius Wilson, and others—have the social sciences really become totally anesthetized, as Isaac claims?

Isaac misreads the neoprogressives when he has them blaming the current situation on the right's ability to distract the attention of the electorate with "phony" social issues. Some writers for whom economics is everything may prefer to see things that way. But E.J. Dionne, Michael Lind, and others have said just the opposite—that it has been liberals' failure to comprehend just how potent and "real" those issues are that has proven so costly. Rather, I take the neoprogressive argument, in its various forms, to be that liberals and leftists have grown so invested in their own form of moralistic thinking about separate group rights that they have lost the ability to articulate much sense of the common good. Partly, this is a legacy of the late 1960s, when liberals (and even some leftists), having wrongly persuaded themselves that economic growth or unionization had stifled the problems of class, turned to race- and gender-based formulas for social justice, and wound up alienating millions of their erstwhile supporters. With some fairness, the left came to be seen as a preserve for elitists, with little to offer ordinary taxpayers—as much a part of the national shell game as their opponents. "Screw 'em all," became the widespread and worrisome, but understandable, popular response.

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I agree with Isaac that "current conditions make the recreation of a coherent, mass-based progressive movement of social reform highly unlikely." But such a movement hasn't existed in this country since the demise of the Debsian Socialist party—and yet the left, loosely conceived, has done a great deal to help improve the nation since then. It has done so precisely by organizing in various "localist" ways—on everything from labor's rights to civil rights—and by applying national political pressure mainly through the Democratic party. In Isaac's essay, the Democrats turn up as little more than carbon copies of the Republicans. If that were actually so, I would be as discouraged as he is about national politics. But I am not.

I am aware of the many arguments, some of them unanswerable, about the hopelessness of the Democrats, their ties to big money, their traitorous ways. Yet for better *and* worse, the party is still a prominent vehicle for social and political reform, well worth fighting in and fighting over. Which is exactly what I think most of the writers whom Isaac criticizes are attempting to do, at least implicitly—to redirect the thinking of the Democratic party, much as numerous conservative writers began redirecting the thinking of the Republican party in the 1950s.

None of which precludes Isaac's "localist" activism, much of which (as in groups like the Alinskyite Industrial Areas Foundation) has been around for a long time. But to see American politics in the either/or fashion that Isaac does is self-defeating. Without the sort of modest movements that Isaac favors, national political reform would be doomed. Equally, though, without some involvement and leverage at the national level—in the grand and imaginative terms that Isaac eschews—"localist" efforts will also be doomed. □

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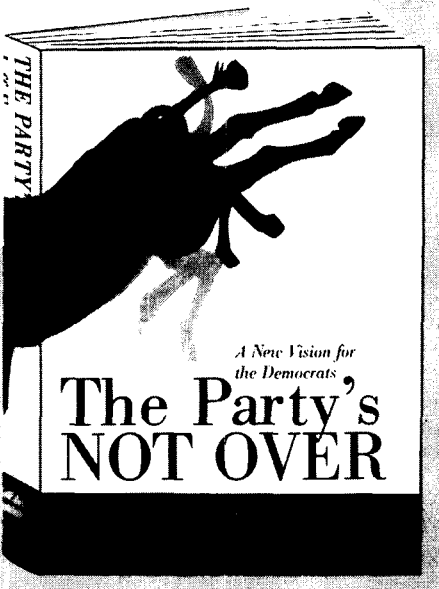

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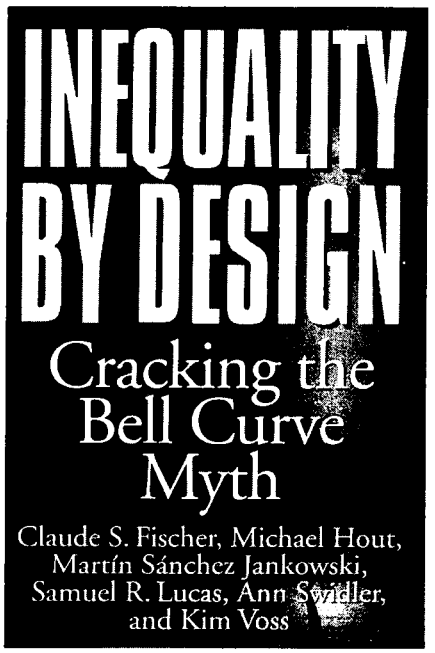

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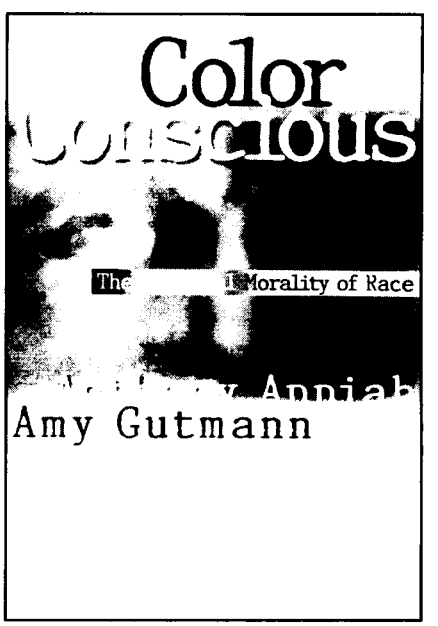

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Frances Fox Piven

WELFARE & THE TRANSFORMATION OF ELECTORAL POLITICS

In August, President Bill Clinton signed a bill that ended the sixty-year-old program for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

To be sure, this was not an entirely new development. Since the 1960s, when the welfare rolls expanded, Republican presidential contenders have regularly homed in on welfare, as if it were one of the country's big problems. And just as regularly, defensive Democrats have tried to ward off the challenge by reciting their belief in "work-not-welfare" and proposing schemes to put recipients to work.

But the 1992 presidential campaign brought welfare to center stage. As usual, George Bush bashed welfare in his January 1992 State of the Union message. And then, during the campaign, Bill Clinton tried to steal the issue for the Democrats by promising to "end welfare as we know it" with reforms that would mean "two years and off to work."

With that, the race was on, and the president, the Congress, and the governors all tried to position themselves as leaders in the campaign to dismantle AFDC. At first the Clinton administration talked of new programs in job training and job creation, health care, and day care, all of which would presumably make it possible for mothers to work. However, such programs cost big money, much more than the AFDC program. As the dollar estimates mounted, the services and job promotion side of the plan shrank. In the end, the most important feature of the Clinton proposal was a two-year lifetime limit on cash assistance.

After the 1994 congressional election, the victorious Republicans tried to go the president one better. They proposed to eliminate federal responsibility for cash assistance to poor mothers and children in favor of block grants, which would give the states less federal money over time but broader latitude in deciding how that money should be spent, or whether it should be spent at all. Other provisions would restrain any wayward state inclined toward generosity by imposing rigid work requirements and strict time limits on the receipt of aid. Last winter, Clinton vetoed a particularly mean-spirited combination of these reforms, but indicated he would welcome a slightly less punitive combination.

Meanwhile, state politicians have pioneered their own battery of welfare changes. In this area, the states have indeed been a laboratory of sorts. State politicians campaigned on the promise to slash welfare and then forged ahead with grant cuts and time limits. And the states invented the symbolically potent schemes to use benefit cuts to change behavior, reducing grants if a woman gives birth while on welfare, for example, or if a child is truant from school. Rules of this sort have now been adopted by two-thirds of the states. As a result of these state-level initiatives, most of which had to be approved by the Clinton administration before they were implemented, AFDC caseloads are already dropping rapidly, even before federal cutbacks are implemented. At a meeting of the American Enterprise Institute last spring, Douglas Besharov called this flood of state initiatives "welfare reform on the cheap." Even without legislation, President Clinton could indeed claim, Besharov said, that "he has ended welfare as we know it."

Why is all this happening? Why the trum-

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peting of welfare as a major and growing problem of American society when AFDC is in fact a relatively small program? Fewer than five million adults are on the rolls, a number that has not changed much since the early 1970s. Measured as a proportion of the poor or as a proportion of single-parent households, the numbers have in fact shrunk. And program costs are modest. AFDC accounts for about 1 percent of the federal budget. If child nutrition and food stamps are included, the programs account for 3 percent of the federal budget.

So why the uproar, and the draconian solution? Certainly it doesn't fit the dominant view of how elections are won or lost in the United States. For more than half a century, political scientists have said that voters are moved by "pocketbook" issues. It was assumed that economic conditions dominated modern elections, indeed, that electoral outcomes could virtually be read from the economic indicators.

The preoccupation with welfare contradicts this model of electoral economism. Although the talk is about AFDC, the new legislation includes cuts in a range of other means-tested programs, particularly food stamps and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). And other bills target Medicaid and low-income housing programs. This means not only benefit cuts for the very poor, but massive public-sector job losses and downward pressure on the wages of less skilled workers in the private sector, who will find themselves competing with the increasingly desperate people who lose their public jobs or benefits. In effect, instead of campaigning with promises of economic improvement, politicians are campaigning with proposals to worsen economic conditions for a wide swath of the voting public.

The explanation that inevitably springs to mind is that globalization has made it impossible for national governments to deliver economic benefits. I think globalization has been used too sweepingly to explain economic trends in the United States. If American politicians, especially Democratic politicians, are less inclined to campaign with economic appeals, it is not because they are held in check by international markets but because they are held in check by politicized business interests.

Whether the causes lie in of global markets or in the politics of the capitalist class, electoral mobilization by means of economic appeals characteristic of the industrial era has weakened. And for the moment at least, a very American kind of fundamentalist irrationalism, which the obsession with welfare signifies, is compensating for the vacuousness of contemporary economic appeals.

The Usual Explanations

Before I turn to this broader argument, I need to deal with more familiar explanations that also bear on the rise of welfare politics. One is that the drive for tax cuts is forcing welfare spending cuts. Another is that politicians are merely responding to the fact that Americans detest welfare.

First, tax cuts and spending cuts. The assault on the means-tested programs can be explained as simply an expression of the greed of mobilized business interests and the politicians they fund. This part of the story goes back to 1981. One of Ronald Reagan's first initiatives was a round of tax cuts skewed toward business and the affluent, coupled with rapid increases in military spending. Of course, the deficit widened—which, as we later learned from David Stockman, was intentional. The expectation was that the growing deficit would generate powerful pressures for social program cuts. In the 1980s, however, the Democratic Congress resisted sharp reductions.

After the election of 1994, the new Republican majority in Congress proposed another round of huge tax cuts, again benefiting the most affluent. This time the plan to make up for the forfeited tax revenues with cuts in programs for the poor and the elderly had less opposition. All of the means-tested programs, as well as student loans and Medicare, were slated for big cuts. And AFDC was singled out for the biggest cut, some 57 percent of its federal funding over the seven-year projected budget. The reason for this tilt against programs for the poor seems transparent. The well-off want more big tax cuts. The easiest way to get them is to take them from the poor, who generally have neither lobbyists nor beholden politicians to defend them.

Still, greed could not be the whole of it.

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ter all, the politicians leading this campaign are elected. They need voter support. And the polls show popular support, both for the attack on government in general, and for the attack on programs for the poor. Why these animosities?

An obvious answer is that Americans, bred to a market culture that celebrates individual self-reliance and material success, just don't like welfare or the poor who rely on it, and this public antipathy is fueling punitive welfare reform. Moreover, welfare policies and practices have always worked to reinforce this dislike for the poor, first in England, where American-style poor relief was developed, and then in the United States. Think, for example, of the ancient practices for dealing with the supplicant poor, including the lash, the brand, and other rituals of public humiliation; or think of the nineteenth-century poor-law system, with its elaborate arrangements for consigning the poor to hellholes called "houses of industry."

These sorts of Durkheimian rituals for defining the poor as the marginal Other are also embedded in contemporary American relief practices. By segregating the poor into different programs, American welfare policy reinforces the separation of the poor from working- and middle-class Americans, and also creates sharp divisions among the poor. And once categorized by the programs, the poor are denigrated by the treatment accorded them. Benefits in these programs are less likely to be a matter of right and more likely to be discretionary, subject to the successful hurdling of bureaucratic inquisitions and continuing bureaucratic surveillance. Finally, recipients are kept very poor, ensuring their marginalization in an affluent and materialistic society.

Thus, there is something to the argument that attributes welfare cutbacks to the voters' antipathy to the program. But although there are deep currents of dislike for the poor and the "dependent" in American culture, we still have to understand why they have welled up now. A thoughtful answer will consider the broad developments that have contributed to the feebleness of electoral economism in contemporary American politics.

The Decline of Electoral Economism

Conditions would seem to be ripe for economic appeals to the electorate. The enormous changes sweeping through the economy are clearly generating discontent and anxiety. Wages are falling for most people, despite the fact that work time is lengthening. And as the old mass production industries shrink, new and onerous forms of work are spreading, in chicken processing or garbage recycling plants, for example, where the pace is hard and the work filthy, or in speeded-up service sector businesses where computers monitor keystrokes or bathroom breaks. Sweatshops again are clustered in the older cities. Meanwhile, inequalities are widening at a dizzying pace, as income and wealth shifts from workers to owners and managers of capital.

Naturally, there is discontent. But why does it take such perverse form? After all, generations of pundits took for granted that voters held candidates responsible for the performance of the economy. Why is popular ire now directed against the most vulnerable? And why, in the 1994 election, were there heavy Democratic losses to the Republicans among less educated whites, who are among the big losers from labor market change?

The answer lies in the failure of political leaders, Democrats and Republicans alike, to articulate rational solutions to the economic hardships and insecurities that dominate the popular mood. Since the New Deal, American presidents, especially Democratic presidents, talked to voters about broad economic and social conditions, promised public action, and in that context were even able to talk about the marginalized poor, and to build voter support for public action to ameliorate poverty.

Clinton did the reverse. True, he campaigned in 1992 on "It's the economy, stupid," but he coupled that with welfare bashing and rhetoric about family values and individual responsibility. More important, he did not deliver on his economic promises. He allowed a weak economic stimulus package to fail, never pushed hard for a restoration of the buying power of the minimum wage, didn't promote legislation

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to strengthen the unions, and joined with the Republicans to become a champion of free trade, promoting the deregulation of international markets under the North American Free Trade Agreement and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Of course, there were economic promises to smooth the way: once international markets were unfettered, a golden era of economic growth would ensue. In fact, he presided over an economic upturn in which productivity and profits moved up briskly but wages stagnated, part-time and temporary work expanded, and earnings for the less educated continued to fall. And as the 1996 campaign began, Clinton was echoing the Republican budget balancing, tax cut, and spending cut proposals.

The reason for this blockage in the political system is not the rise of a global economy, in which threats of capital flight and low-wage competition fatally weaken the ability of nation states to control their economies. The penetration of goods, labor, and capital from abroad is a real factor, but the argument is deployed too sweepingly. Government has not suddenly been made helpless before markets, and especially the American government is not helpless. Most other industrial nations are far more exposed to international trade and capital movements than the United States. Yet no other rich democratic nation has been so hard hit by the traumas that are widely attributed to globalization, including the evisceration of unions, the enormous wage cuts, the slashing of the public sector, or the extremes of poverty and wealth.

There *is* a good deal of capital mobility in the United States, which may lend an air of credibility to arguments about globalization. But much of this mobility is within our own borders. In principle, the national government retains the capacity to regulate the economy.

In fact, new production methods that facilitate outsourcing and reliance on less skilled workers may have much more to do with the alarming trend of increasing productivity and stagnant or declining wages than international competition. But this development has none of the politically enervating implications of globalization, because the consequences of such innovations are entirely susceptible to government regulation.

In short, if political leaders are shrinking from voter mobilization through economic appeals, it is not because economic change has rendered the American government helpless to regulate the economy. Something else is going on.

Class Politics and Restructuring the State

A good deal of light can be cast on the decline of pocketbook politics if we shift attention from economic change to the politics made possible by economic change. A series of economic developments associated with postindustrialism has paved the way for a much more aggressive capitalist class politics. Capital is using the leverage it gains from the increased mobility of goods and capital—or perhaps from the specter of increased mobility—as well as from the insecurities generated by downsizing in a series of vigorous political campaigns to achieve its preferred public policies.

Beginning in the 1970s, large employers became much more belligerent toward unions, stridently resisting new organizing efforts and working to roll back earlier union gains. At the same time, business organized to change public policies, especially regulatory and tax policies. Business representatives and business money flowed into the Republican party and developed a political agenda, funding new think tanks, policy institutes, and journals to do the work that, after the 1960s, universities could not be relied upon to do.

Meanwhile, business groups mounted a formidable ideological campaign, launching an argument about the natural primacy of markets over politics and the state (no matter that organized business was itself using politics and the state to secure enormous new advantages, and not least to create some of the conditions for international penetration that were then described as natural and inevitable).

Ideological battles are not fought with words alone. The Republican Congress elected in 1994, tutored no doubt by business-backed think tanks, pushed for a series of new constraints on the national government that would indeed leave

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it helpless to regulate markets, thus making the ideology of globalism "true." In effect, the Republican program would strip the national government of the capacity to do what contemporary governments do to reduce the extremes of inequality, regulate economic instabilities, and curb business excesses. The proposal for a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is intended to put a brake not only on spending by the national government but on its ability to raise taxes as well, by requiring supermajorities for the passage of tax increases in Congress. Other bills would impede the federal government's ability to regulate business by requiring obstructive review procedures or extravagant compensation to private owners for losses due to regulation. And still other measures are designed to discourage citizens from turning to the courts to resolve grievances against corporations. Finally, there is the radical rollback of federal means-tested programs.

Viewed together, it is clear that these proposals work to further decentralize the American state. As the national government is less and less able to do what governments do, responsibilities will devolve to the states. The banner hoisted to explain these changes is that state governments are "closer to the people." The slogan echoes with the convictions of the late-eighteenth-century antifederalists who opposed the original Constitution because they feared a remote central government would become the instrument of elites. But in the twentieth century, it is the state governments that are more sensitive to business political pressures, simply because states (and localities) are far more vulnerable to the threat of disinvestment, and even a single corporate relocation can devastate a community. Early in this century, for example, efforts to pass state worker compensation laws were stymied by business threats to move to other states—until manufacturers themselves, prodded by multiplying damage suits in the courts, decided to back modest legislation.

State governments have grown more susceptible to bribes and threats of business investment and disinvestment as capital has become more mobile. This, together with the fact that most movement of American business still takes place within our national borders, makes the fiscal and regulatory powers of the federal government more important than ever. And this may well be why congressional Republicans are determined to hobble those powers.

In sum, a mobilized business class, acting through a resurgent Republican party and a wavering Democratic president, is both invoking the threat of capital mobility that appears to weaken state power and taking large steps to make that threat real. Whether this agenda will be realized remains to be seen. If it is, the ideology of neo-laissez-faire will have contributed to the construction of institutional arrangements that do indeed make government, and the democratic publics that can influence governments, nearly helpless before markets.

The Rise of Irrational Politics

When people are blocked from dealing with the problems of livelihood, community, respect, and security through politics, they become more susceptible to fundamentalist appeals. When institutional reforms seem impossible, frustrated publics are more likely to respond to calls for a politics of individual moral rejuvenation, typically coupled with calls to mobilize against some vulnerable group. This group becomes the Other, embodying a kind of moral pollution that is to blame for the problems people experience in daily life.

Something like this seems to be underway in the United States. Politicians are trying to direct popular attention away from the issues of wages and jobs to a politics of individual responsibility and "values." At the same time, political leaders are pointing to minorities and the poor, and especially poor women, as the miscreants, the polluters, whose transgressions of core values are responsible for contemporary troubles.

These manipulative appeals draw on real anxieties generated by a culture in flux. Not least important, sexual and family mores are changing, eroding a world in which men are men, women are women, and the rules for mating and family life are clear. Changes of this sort can generate terror, perhaps because they challenge meanings deeply imprinted in early childhood. These cultural insecurities clearly helped to fuel

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the rise of the Christian Right. But fundamentalist appeals are not restricted to the Christian Right. They infuse the electioneering of both Democrats and Republicans, as suggested by the "family values" themes to which Clinton and Dole repeatedly return.

The campaign against welfare plays a central part in this electioneering. Indeed, the relentless charges leveled by politicians and conservative think-tank experts are as much an argument about what is wrong with America as an argument about welfare policy. The heart of the argument is the idea that big American problems—deepening poverty, the breakdown of family and community, a kind of demoralization overtaking our society—are centered on poor and minority women. These women are said to contradict all of the old Protestant virtues of industry and self-reliance, of chastity and self-restraint. And their immorality is perversely encouraged by government welfare programs.

Welfare, the argument goes, allows young women to quit school or work and have out-of-wedlock babies. Once on the dole, these women become trapped and dependent, unable to summon the initiative to get a job, unable even to raise their children properly. As a consequence, children raised on welfare turn into school dropouts and delinquents, and then into welfare users themselves. Welfare, in short, is encouraging the spread of a moral rot in American society. The solution is not hard to see: eliminate the perverse incentives. This "tough love" will deter young women from having babies in the first place, and those who already have will be forced to go to work to support their children. There may be some hardship along the way, but this is the only way to make poor women moral and self-reliant.

The very familiarity of the argument gives it the ring of truth. But it makes little sense. Slashing welfare will not create jobs for unskilled women burdened with childrearing responsibilities. And it certainly won't create jobs at wages that can support a family. What it will do is crowd the low-wage labor market with millions of desperate women, ready to work at any wage and under any conditions.

The claim that welfare is causing a tide of "illegitimacy" generates still more heat. But divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births are increasing in all Western societies, and among all social classes, in no apparent relationship with the generosity of social assistance. To be sure, the United States does have more single-parent families than other Western countries. But this suggests that welfare is not significantly related to single-parent family formation, since most other rich countries provide more generous assistance to single mothers. And there is no correlation between benefits and out-of-wedlock birth rates within the United States, where out-of-wedlock birth rates have risen despite sharply declining welfare benefits over the past two decades. In fact, the percentage of single mothers who receive welfare has declined over time, which would not be the case if women were having babies to get welfare.

Nor does the all-too-familiar view that welfare is the cause of illegitimacy among black women stand up. The nonmarital birth rates of black women have risen in tandem with the overall trend. At the same time, however, marital birth rates have declined, because unemployment, falling wages, and rising incarceration rates mean that there are fewer men in black communities who have the income or stability to be reliable husbands. As a consequence, the proportion of babies born out of wedlock in the black community has indeed zoomed.

So much for the facts. But this sort of argument is not won or lost with facts, and certainly not with facts alone. Opinions are too excited and inflamed. They evoke preoccupations deeply etched in American culture, including our age-old dislike of the poor, especially the supplicant poor, our racial antipathies, and our strange American obsession with sexual transgression. And they draw their fury from the awful anxieties that people experience as their familiar worlds collapse.

What will be the reactions as families are actually cut off aid, and visible consequences accumulate? Child beggars will join men on the streets, women and babies will huddle over grates, and urban slums will continue their slide into medieval wastelands. Do these horrors guarantee a reversal of course? To the contrary, the

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visible and deepening degradation of poor women and children could well fuel fundamentalist calls for individual moral rejuvenation and the purging of the Other. This sort of politics is not, after all, alien to an American history that is studded with episodes of murderous hate politics animated by economic grievances. Pat Buchanan's attacks on a government that gives hard-earned tax dollars to welfare moms is part of this history. So are the paranoid militias with their doctrines of national and racial purity, and the Christian Right with its obsession with sexual morality.

But other aspects of our history argue that hate politics will not work for long. For one thing, the program cutbacks under the banner of "welfare reform" will have wide reverberations. It will not only be poor women and their babies who will huddle over the grates. Huge takebacks are planned not only in welfare spending, but in Medicaid, housing, and social service programs. These cuts involve far larger sums, and they will mean enormous job losses in the public and voluntary sectors, with potentially devastating effects on working-class urban neighborhoods, and on the landlords and small businesses that depend on poor and working-class consumers. And as the consequences of "welfare reform" spread, dragging down broader swaths of the population, the raw and simple politics of victim-blaming will become less persuasive. Even now, the polls show that the pocketbook issues, which receded in the din of propaganda about welfare, crime, and immigration, are surging to the fore again.

Earlier periods of aggressive and reckless business mobilization, in the 1890s and 1920s, helped precipitate the popular mobilizations that made possible the great political reforms of the twentieth century. First in the Progressive era, then again during the New Deal, social movements combined with electoral instability to force the forging of new government initiatives that tempered business excesses and reduced the extremes of inequality.

No one has ever successfully predicted the moments when ordinary people find their footing, discover new capacities for solidarity and power and new visions of the possible. Still, the development of American democracy depended on the perennial emergence of popular revolt in the past, and it does once again. □

To Our Contributors

A few suggestions:

(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript. And please remember that we can't return articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. No dot matrix submissions, *please*. Use WordPerfect 5.1 or standard text ASCII format, and send us the disk. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing. If you are submitting to *Dissent* electronically, our e-mail address is dissent@igc.apc.org.

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THE EDITORS □

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Susan Lambiase and James B. Rule

BLOCK GRANTS AND THE END OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In today's politics of the family, the right has claimed the high ground. They're the ones laying down the law on "family values." Come to think of it, they're the ones who concocted that tendentious term and slipped it into current political discourse. The left has allowed itself to be thrown on the defensive—as though it had no distinctive principles to advocate in defending and strengthening America's families.

The right's "family values" rap has one thing going for it—simplicity. The American family is going to hell, they believe (figuratively and, for some of them, literally). The reason is the moral weakness of those with family troubles, and the willingness of policy makers to excuse or support such decadence. The solution? People have got to pull up their own socks; parents must take responsibility for their families.

Above all, the right insists, government must stop meddling, with its dependency-inducing programs for family support. Or, if government is to address the needs of families at all, responsibility must not reside with the remote, out-of-touch institutions of Washington. Instead, family policy has to be directed from those levels of government closest to real people's needs—the states or even localities. Block grants, not federal mandates, are the latest expression of this vision.

All of this resonates predictably with today's alienated, antigovernment populism. But these ideas spell disaster for the most vulnerable of those touched by the family wars—children. They are the ones who pay the highest price for the troubles of today's increasingly unstable and destructive families. Yet the policies touted by the right are calculated to undercut the limited but by no means insignificant protections currently available to America's children.

Dimensions of the Problem

There is no doubt that children are in danger. More than fourteen million children live in poverty in this country, more than in any year since 1965. Some of these children will grow up in stable, nurturing homes, receive an adequate education, and ultimately bring themselves and their own children out of poverty. Increasing numbers will not. Statistics tell part of their story:

- In 1992, some 2.9 million children were the subject of an abuse or neglect report—a serious warning sign—and an increase of 130 percent in ten years.
- More than 440,000 children are in foster care—a 62 percent increase in ten years.
- Admissions to juvenile justice facilities reached an all-time high of 900,000 children in 1992.
- Children are entering foster care at younger ages and staying there longer.

Studies are now documenting the connection between abuse and neglect and juvenile crime; they also show the connection between unstable foster-care arrangements and violence. Children removed from their homes and placed in three or more foster care settings, for example, are almost three times more likely than other foster children to be arrested.

Admissions to juvenile justice facilities have risen steadily since 1984. As with foster care, children of racial minorities are disproportion-

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ately overrepresented in juvenile justice facilities. Minority children rose from 53 percent of this population in 1987 to 63 percent in 1991.

Most Americans, we suspect, regard these stark realities with a mixtur of repugnance and denial—aware of the reality of child abuse and neglect, but unwilling to reflect on it. But from time to time—and now more and more often—heart-wrenching tales of cruelty and death leap out of the newspapers and television screens.

Here are two stories—the first little-known, the second notorious:

In New Mexico, seventeen-year-old "Charles" has been convicted of second-degree murder. Charles entered foster care at the age of six. He first attempted suicide at the age of seven. He has been in and out of thirty-four foster care placements over the last ten years. While Charles's fragile emotional state gradually improved at some treatment facilities, the Department of Human Services kept returning Charles to his mother, who was unable to care for him. After each return home, Charles's mental state became more precarious, so that he required institutionalization. When he was convicted of murder, the New Mexico foster care system closed its case; Charles was now the responsibility of a different state institution.

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Last year, six-year-old Elisa Izquierdo, known to New York City child welfare officials for years as a child in danger, was murdered. Although her aunt was willing and able to care for her after her father's death, Elisa was ordered to live with her drug-addicted, deeply troubled mother. Family court ordered, however, that the home be closely monitored by child welfare authorities. For fourteen months, the officials failed to monitor the home, failed to talk to Elisa, and failed to investigate several well-founded reports of suspected abuse. On November 20, 1995, after months of abuse, Elisa died at her mother's hands. In June, the mother pled guilty to her murder.

When atrocities like Elisa's death hit the media, public apathy on child welfare turns to outrage. Most people reflexively demand that those responsible should suffer the worst possible fate. Some, with a bit more reflection, may also wonder o loud how the public agencies responsible could have decayed to the point where such disasters are possible. Few reflect on the causes of Joseph's situation, and the calls for treating juveniles as adult offenders intensify.

Child Welfare Protections

All such reactions are understandable. But they make a poor substitute for understanding the forces shaping the welfare of endangered children in America today. The picture in fact is not totally bleak. The United States has in place potentially potent tools for protecting children against the worst hazards of family breakdown and neglect. The institutional fiascoes and personal tragedies that sicken the public conscience stem not from an absence of proper remedies, but from the lack of political will and public commitment necessary to make these remedies work. And the worst of it is that the right's proposals for devolution of responsibility to states and localities would make things far worse.

Current federal statutes establish an important cluster of rights for endangered children—along with legal mechanisms for making good on those rights. Basic to this legislation is the federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (the "Child Welfare Act"). Federal assistance to states' child welfare programs is provided under this statute for such crucial services and protections as room and board and adoption assistance for children with special needs, outreach, recruitment and monitoring of foster care placements, and staff training. Note that the programs mandated here are *entitlements* for each child who needs the service. There is no cap on funding.

The work involved in administering child-welfare programs is not carried out by federal staff. Instead, states and localities receiving federal funds provide the services, but must follow federal rules for their administration. For example, a state must ensure that its child welfare system provides (1) an information system that conforms to statutory requirements; (2) written case plans for each child in care and periodic

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reviews and hearings; (3) a permanent placement program; and (4) proper care and placement in the least restrictive (most family-like) setting available.

Anyone familiar with the damage done to children from poorly administered child welfare programs will understand how crucial these standards are. And federal law has strictures to enforce them—that is, strictures that *could* result in effective enforcement. States and localities must report their plans for child welfare and adoption assistance to the federal government, for example. If the states do not conform to federal mandates—if the state plan is inadequate or does not contain particular elements—the states will not be entitled to federal funding.

Finally—and crucially—case law interpreting the Child Welfare Act gives children the right to enforce federal protections in court. If a state receiving federally mandated funds under the Child Welfare Act does not provide a specific protection guaranteed by the statute, children can sue the state to enforce the provision.

Such a right may seem nothing more than window dressing. Who could expect an isolated child to initiate court action against a welfare bureaucracy? But, in fact, this provision has brought to life one of the most potent forces for defense of children's rights. The right to enforce these provisions through lawsuits means that child-welfare advocates may enter the courts on behalf of children who would otherwise have no one to protect them. This has led to court judgments for broad categories of children. Perhaps even more important, legal actions by child-welfare groups have forced system-wide institutional reform in many states.

The work of the organizations now playing this role is crucial. Public-interest legal organizations such as Legal Aid, Legal Service Corporations, the National Center for Youth Law, and Children's Rights, Inc., have challenged neglect of federal child protection standards throughout the country—and often won significant victories.

Unfortunately, the scope for their efforts is vast. To take just one instance, a study of reported child abuse and neglect in Milwaukee found that

- In 48 percent of all child abuse and neglect investigations, no government worker ever made face-to-face contact with the parent or child.
- Of a group of 118 children alleged to have been physically abused, only five received a medical exam.
- In 49 percent of cases in which abuse or neglect did occur, the case was closed and the child left at home with no services provided.

Children who end up entering the Milwaukee foster care system fare even worse:

- More than a third of the children determined by the system to have a goal of "return home" remained in foster care for more than three years.
- Forty-two percent had no face-to-face contact with their social worker in the previous year.
- Half the children whose foster parents are considered potential adoptive parents had been waiting four years or longer for adoption to be finalized. One child had been waiting nine years without action from the state.

In Wisconsin, millions of dollars in federal reimbursements designated for foster care have already been used for other state programs—not for children.

Wisconsin is not alone in failing to manage its foster care system effectively. Almost everywhere, children in government custody have suffered damage worse than the abuse or neglect they experienced originally. Caseloads have been so high in Washington, D.C., that one worker testified that she couldn't develop plans for children on her caseload; she just wanted to make sure they were alive.

Advocacy Efforts

These are just the sorts of institutional breakdowns that child welfare advocacy organizations confront. Reform efforts are underway in twenty-four states and localities, including New York, Connecticut, Kansas, Kansas City, Mo., Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and Milwaukee. These interventions have brought varying degrees of success in Louisville, Kentucky, Colorado, and New Mexico. Litigation or the threat of litigation, with support from national

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and local child welfare experts, has often worked to forge long-term solutions to the problems of poor and neglected children.

The role played by these embattled organizations underlines the indispensability of civil society as a complement to state action. Often operating on a shoestring, they have compelled governments to produce results commensurate with the vast amounts spent on child welfare. Acting sometimes as a conscience to public officials who might be hard put to find their own, acting as lawyers for the unrepresented, they have obliged both government officials and the general public to acknowledge the true costs of their anything-but-benign neglect of children.

Even defendants in these lawsuits sometimes concede that such legal action does much to turn around failed child welfare bureaucracies. In New Mexico, a senior state official recently said that the child welfare litigation "did more to improve [the New Mexico] child welfare system than anything I've seen in the last fifteen years." In Missouri, a state commissioner credited the lawsuit against the child welfare system with creating momentum for a "model system" in the county where the Children's Rights, Inc., suit was filed, one that should serve as a basis for statewide reform.

What most Americans don't realize is that *it is precisely these crucial forms of civic action that would be hamstrung by the "reforms" promoted by the right.* Right-wing efforts at "block granting" child welfare funds aim at something far more sweeping—and far more insidious—than simply shifting the administration of these activities closer to local levels. The first Child Welfare Block Grant bill—part of the "Personal Responsibility Act of 1995"—passed in the House on March 24 of that year. Ultimately it met with a Clinton veto, along with the rest of the "welfare reform" bill. But no informed observer thinks that we have seen the last of attempts to transform child-welfare mandates and entitlements into block grants. Under such arrangements, states would follow no rules but their own, spending federal money with only minimal restrictions.

Indeed, the block grant legislation as originally proposed would have capped funding of child welfare in the states. It would have reduced, by at least 2.7 billion dollars over five years, federal funds available to states for foster care, adoption assistance and other services to protect children and families. It would have allowed states to further reduce funds and, after two years, transfer up to 30 percent of their federal block grant funds to other block grant funds. It would have eliminated any requirement that states contribute their own funds for these purposes.

More chilling still, block granting of child protection would eliminate the ability of children's rights organizations to act on behalf of children under the Child Welfare Act. The standing to sue under this law has been the best tool available to children's rights advocates to force public agencies to meet their responsibilities—by providing the federal standards and entitlements that permit children's advocates to file suit against failing state and local systems.

Organizations such as Children's Rights, Inc. initiate court action on behalf of children—often in cases that extend over years, if not decades. Most Americans, we suspect, would applaud these efforts. Private donations fund these activities up to a point, but these sources never suffice to bankroll the huge costs of long-haul litigation. However, when courts find on behalf of the interests represented by these organizations, they order payment of fees to the plaintiffs. Though long in coming and never assured until the last moment, these payments ultimately underwrite the exhausting and drawn-out legal campaigns that make the difference between public responsibility for children and public neglect. It is this crucial source of funding that block granting will undercut.

Reactionary "Reforms"

The right-wing effort to "reform" child welfare aims ultimately at rescinding the country's moral responsibility for its children—and at removing the most effective legal tool to force negligent state and local bureaucracies to act on behalf of children. Abused and neglected children would be left to the meager mercies of the agencies that have the worst records in protecting them.

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These efforts bear a distinct resemblance to a host of other right-wing initiatives from recent years. They reflect the same mentality as the attempts to undermine the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or to undercut protections against environmental hazards, or to gut rural legal services. For that matter, they are part of the same mind-set underlying opposition to civil rights protections for gays in the 1990s—or for African-Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. The idea is that federal measures to protect the vulnerable somehow demean those involved or restrict their absolute freedom to make their own way in life. Workers ought to make up their own minds about environmental dangers when they "choose" to accept employment, the argument goes; the market will decide how much safety is required. Or, government protections for gays would put them in a "privileged" position of enjoying "special" rights not accorded to ordinary citizens. A government intrusive enough to protect such groups, the logic goes, is liable to threaten all people with the deprivation of their liberties.

These arguments are unseemly enough when mobilized against beleaguered groups like those mentioned above. But when they are applied to threatened or neglected children, not even an ideological fig leaf remains. Of course government must provide the ultimate defense against neglect, grave mistreatment, and other manifest dangers to children. And of course it is a good thing that activist groups be able to act as advocates of endangered children to ensure that government institutions meet their responsibilities.

What if someone suggested that Social Security be subjected to the philosophy of block granting? Federal obligations to contributors to the system would be suspended, and monies collected would be turned over to the states and municipalities to distribute. There would be no guarantees of base-line levels of provision, no recourse for those whose benefits went unpaid by state or local bureaucracies. Obviously, responsibility for Social Security would be much closer to home under such arrangements. But would such proximity really be a blessing? Or would people suspect that the shift would undermine the underlying commitments?

Protecting the nation's most vulnerable children should hardly be less serious a responsibility than protecting Social Security. There are all sorts of good reasons why state and local agencies should enjoy a measure of administrative flexibility in carrying out such responsibilities. But ultimate national oversight and responsibility are indispensable.

The notion that the right has a natural monopoly on the defense of families is ridiculous. The question is, what response is in order when families fail in the most fundamental way—by failing to protect children from immediate psychological or physical danger? When we reach such points of moral extremity, all citizens must join to prevent catastrophe. At that point, assertion of responsibility by federal institutions is an elementary expression of family values. □

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Maria Cancian and Linda Gordon

MAKING MOTHERS "WORK"

Wisconsin Leads, But in What Direction?

If you think of Wisconsin as a progressive pioneer in the development of social welfare policy, the first state to offer unemployment compensation, it pays to remember that it was also the home of Joseph McCarthy, who built his career by attacking the welfare state. The "Wisconsin Works" (or W-2) welfare statute is being touted as another example of pioneering social policy, but toward what end? Wisconsin's "reform" is in the vanguard now, but federal policy is encouraging other states to follow.

New federal welfare legislation eliminates any entitlement to benefits, requires states to impose time limits and work requirements, and generally leaves the states with discretion, allocating federal funding in block grants. But it's not at all clear how states will respond, especially since politicians, trying to win support by denouncing welfare, have expounded contradictory purposes. They argue that they can combine getting people "off welfare" and helping them, fostering "work not welfare" and saving tax money, promoting "responsibility" while protecting children. Telling the truth about our options requires recognizing that the overall state of the economy, not individual character, is the major limit on helping the poor to be able to live and support their children on their earnings, and that helping them do so would cost more, not less, public funding for welfare.

"Welfare," of course, means Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). It is often forgotten that AFDC is part of the Social Security Act of 1935, which also brought us unemployment compensation and old age pensions. AFDC was originally a neglected stepchild of Social Security: unlike the better Social Security programs, it was jointly funded by federal and state governments; involved a case management approach in which applicants had to prove their financial eligibility and moral respectability (undergoing a close personal scrutiny from which unemployment or old-age insurance recipients were entirely free); allowed caseworkers discretion in reducing or eliminating benefits to anyone they judged to be unworthy; and never paid stipends adequate to create life with dignity. But in the 1960s AFDC recipients, stimulated by the civil rights movement and by a maternalist pride in their work as mothers, created the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) and their pressure got the law changed. NWRO activism led the Supreme Court to decide that AFDC too was an entitlement: that the government could not offer such a program without guaranteeing equal access to it, that a recipient had a right to an appeal and a hearing before being cut off.

The basis of W-2 is eliminating that entitlement. Poor families can no longer count on having AFDC or Medicaid as a last resort, and they no longer have a right to hearings to protect them from arbitrary or biased decisions. There is nothing to stop the Wisconsin legislature from appropriating insufficient funds (in fact, that is the usual story with welfare programs) and then simply cutting people off after the money runs out each year. And although welfare reformers argue that working for benefits will increase recipients' self-esteem, ending entitlement will more likely reinforce the humiliations of getting help and the impression that recipients are undeserving.

W-2's promise is that, by rejecting entitle-

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ment and returning to the case management approach, it allows caseworkers to tailor the program to individual needs. One problem is that good case management is expensive, because it requires trained workers with manageable caseloads. Case managers are being instructed by the law, and the conservative discourse about it, to blame poor mothers for their problems and to focus on changing individual behavior. The official "Philosophy and Goals" of W-2 states, "There will be no entitlement. The W-2 reward system is designed to reward appropriate behavior."

"Appropriate behavior" now always means paid work. W-2 eliminates cash assistance; participants are required to work full time with almost no allowance for job training or education, and exceptions for new parents only until their youngest child is twelve weeks old. The program creates a four-tier job "self-sufficiency ladder." The lowest tier, "W-2 Transition," is reserved for those few individuals—less than one in four recipients by state estimates—who case managers determine cannot move immediately to work. Unlike the other three tiers, some of those at the bottom of the ladder will be allowed to engage in their assigned activity for less than full time. They will receive a grant of $518 a month. Tier three, Community Service Jobs, means a mandatory forty-hour week in exchange for $555 per month. Officials estimate that about half of current recipients will begin their W-2 experience here; these recipients can get food stamps but not the earned income tax credit and will have to make child and health care copayments. Even by state estimates, only a quarter of participants will be able to move into the top two tiers: subsidized and unsubsidized private sector jobs. In these tiers they will earn at least minimum wage, will qualify for earned income tax credits, and will continue to be eligible for subsidized child care and health insurance. These individuals will be the best off on W-2.

The theory of W-2 is that women will work their way up the ladder to economic self-sufficiency. The reality of W-2 may be quite different. Research suggests that even those who have left AFDC voluntarily often stay in low paying jobs long term. And even bad jobs may be hard to find. Wisconsin currently has low levels of unemployment, but will they last? And even at current levels can the market absorb so many additional workers? Creating community service jobs for thirty thousand participants will be an expensive challenge. It makes sense for the state to provide jobs for those who can work but cannot find a job. But such jobs should pay a living wage. Under W-2 the state will be creating minimum-wage and sub-minimum-wage jobs. This will create downward pressure on wages and likely displace current workers. Not least, the removal of any safety net undermines workers' bargaining position, making it more difficult to quit, to unionize and to escape harassing bosses or co-workers. There is a nasty parallel here to the fact that the ending of an entitlement takes away poor women's most important escape route from abusive relationships.

The philosophy behind these requirements is that everyone should work for wages. There are differences among feminists and progressives about this proposition: "maternalists" lean toward the argument that mothering is work; "equality" feminists lean toward the view that wage-earning work is often empowering for women. But all agree that working mothers use money to compensate for some of what they don't do at home—a full day of work doesn't leave much time for cooking from scratch, for example. W-2 redefines parenting, however, as *only* providing money.

If most mothers work in the paid labor market, isn't it reasonable to require welfare recipients to do the same? Perhaps not.

- First, although most mothers work for wages, only about a third of Wisconsin mothers with children under eighteen and a quarter of mothers with children under two years work full time.
- Second, many mothers who work full time can count on financial rewards and other support greater than those available to W-2 participants. Under W-2, most parent recipients will have much less time and very little, if any, more money.
- Third, there will be substantial child care problems. Under W-2 even those with the lowest incomes must pay 7.5 percent of their child care costs. There is already a child care shortage even

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for families with adequate incomes. For those with incomes of $555 per month, low cost care will be essential—will it be of decent quality? One-third of poor working mothers have to work weekends, and one-half of poor parents have shifting work schedules: will child care be available to parents with these hours? to children with special health needs? to families dependent on public transportation?

• Fourth, there will always be some parents who can't work outside the home, because they or their children are disabled, for example (and parents of the disabled are particularly vociferous in opposition to this law).

• Fifth, many mothers are on welfare precisely because they can't support themselves and their children on what they can earn. W-2 merely reaffirms the problem, forcing them into jobs at non-living wages.

Is there anything good about W-2? Two-parent families with low incomes will be eligible for all services, and noncustodial parents will have limited access to support services (though not subsidized employment). Access to subsidized health insurance has expanded. Child care subsidies are not time limited, and funding has been increased. Child support payments will go directly to custodial parents and will not count against W-2 benefits. These steps will make it possible for some families to leave AFDC and attain a minimal level of economic self-sufficiency. Because of these benefits and a strong state economy, many W-2 participants will likely fare better than those in states with fewer jobs and less money available for job creation and support services. Nonetheless, W-2 will provide inadequate support and increased stress for many, probably most, poor mothers and their children.

This is not a partisan issue—Democrats were the leaders in this wave of dumping on welfare. Just at Clinton introduced the "end welfare as we know it" promise in 1992, which stimulated Republicans to raise the ante, so in Wisconsin a Democratic legislature tried to steal Republican Governor Tommy Thompson's thunder in 1993 by mandating a proposal to get AFDC recipients into jobs. But legislators aren't facing the fact that, even if one accepts the goal that everyone should "work," getting AFDC recipients into jobs is vastly more expensive than the cheap welfare system we have now.

If W-2 is flawed as a behavior-modification program for women on AFDC, it fails completely as a defense against destitution for their children. Two-thirds of AFDC beneficiaries are children, and they are almost completely forgotten in the welfare reform debate. The critical detail missed in the rhetoric about innovative experiments with welfare is that the subjects of these experiments are mostly kids. Welfare currently gives single mothers too little to provide adequately for their children; welfare "reformed" will generally give them even less. Thus we make sure that the poverty of the parents is imposed on the next generation, perpetuating exactly the hopelessness that welfare was intended to interrupt. □

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Philip Levine

TWO POEMS

CENTRAL RAILWAY, SYDNEY

In a shit-house stall in Central
I saw the one word "Mum"
and thought once more of young men
torn by want or war or hunger
from their families, the West Virginian
I wrote of thirty years ago and knew
fifteen years before that who broke down
and cried and made us cry to hear him.
So I have come full circle in every way.
I sit here helpless, remembering
Pedro Illic's tale of his grandfather
alone crossing an ocean and two
continents to give what was left
of his life to the nitrate mines
of Chile or my own father fleeing
the wars of Tsarist Russia and sent
to the high adventures of England.
What came back from the Somme
or El Alemain? A torn photograph,
a missing place at dinner which dimmed
and finally vanished over the years.
Europe too went on to fade at last,
still with her grinning queens
and princes good at horsemanship,
her armies of the republic that might
turn out for parades, and all
those overwrought statues to the past
and fountains wasting water. Nothing
that can touch and hurt like this
one simple word a boy far from home
and getting farther carved with a key
he'd never use again because he knew
something must be said and said now,
and he couldn't think of whom
to speak to, of who would listen,
or a single other word that would do.

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BEAUTY IS BUT A FLOWER

When she put her slender arm
next to mine I saw the veins
that climbed from her tight fist
leap a moment and then still.
Her name was Alma Savage,
she was then twenty-seven,
up from West Virginia
less than a life, and we worked
swing shift plating plumbing parts
five nights a week going on
our second year and at last
we shared our names. Seated side
by side, legs stretched out before
us, our backs against a stack
of pallets, she'd turned and said,
"Alma, my name is Alma
Savage." So I told her mine.
It was then she thrust her arm
out, her left, then I my right,
and for a frozen moment
we were brother and sister
or maybe something I had
no name for. I closed my eyes.
The smells were bread, whole-wheat bread,
milk, apples, cigarette smoke,
and her sweat as strong as mine
but sweeter. When the buzzer
jarred me awake, she stood up
awkwardly, and then with her
right arm reached down to help me.
The machines were starting up,
the grinders and polishers,
even the time-clock had loosed
its tongue and was babbling in
our heads: 8:30, and then
8:31, and then . . . midnight,
when I stood, chilled and alone,
under the winking stars, a man
breathing October in the wind
while the houses slowly closed
their eyes and the leafless elms
whispered a name I could devour.

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Wade Rathke and Joel Rogers

A STRATEGY FOR LABOR

This is a defining moment for the American labor movement—a moment ripe with opportunity and terror.

On the hopeful side, the AFL-CIO is finally moving again. The "new voices" leadership team of John Sweeney, Richard Trumka, and Linda Chavez-Thompson—which ran for office because, in Sweeney's words, "organized labor is the only voice of American workers and their families, and because the silence [under Lane Kirkland] was deafening"—is making good on campaign promises to increase labor's organizing expenditures; improve its public relations program and its political work; build the capacity of regional bodies (state federations, central labor councils); reach out to women and minorities; and remake the federation's own organization, starting with the appointment of younger, smarter, more aggressive unionists to top staff positions. And as reform roils inside the AFL-CIO, labor is gaining a new public face. The "Union Summer" project that put 1,500 young interns into organizing and political drives over the past few months was a smashing public relations success—leading even *Newsweek* to conclude that "It's Hip to Be Union." The dozens of town hall meetings and rallies held as part of the "America Needs a Raise" campaign put more labor leadership in front of television cameras, speaking for broad working-class concerns, than at any time in living memory. And this November, a modernized political operation, spending $35 million on member education, hopes to end Republican control of the Congress. Labor is moving, showing some muscle, and feeling better about itself than it has in years.

On the terror side . . . it may all be too late. Labor may be gaining new friends, but some of its old ones—like those in a Democratic administration resolutely ambivalent about the worth of unions—are increasingly unreliable. Public opinion is vaguely supportive, but unconvinced that labor has any answers. Labor's power in the economy is drastically diminished—with private sector union membership now down to the pre-New Deal level of only 10 percent, and strikes at their lowest level in fifty years. And it still hasn't figured out how to organize in today's political economy. Just to maintain its present share of the workforce, labor needs three hundred thousand new members a year; to bump present levels up one point—and labor is down twenty points from its 1950s levels—it needs a million a year. But nobody's seen anything like those numbers since the 1930s, and today's world is different.

So labor appears ready for change, but it faces a political and organizing climate quite different from the past. And it still lacks a coherent institutional strategy on just how to revive itself.

What might such a strategy be? Nobody has all the answers and nobody ever will. But at least some of the elements seem clear.

A Role in the Economy

Ask the average person what positive role unions play in the management of our economy and you'll get laughter, hostility, or a blank stare.

This article draws from *A Strategy for Labor*, forthcoming from Cornell University Press.

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This is the first thing that's got to change. The reason is that unions only advance when they do things that not only visibly benefit members or potential members but benefit the broader society as well—and thereby gain the social cachet and political support they need, in this capitalist world, to defend and organize workers.

The need to make this kind of contribution is not particularly controversial. What is controversial is that it usually needs to be made by helping capital itself—on whose well-being the well-being of the society unfortunately depends. This usually takes the form of unions solving some collective problem that frustrates the growth of capitalism but that individual firms have no incentive to solve on their own. Unions use their reach in the economy, their political power in the state, and the interests of their members to force capital to do something good for itself.

In the New Deal and postwar eras, the problem was effective demand—consumers lacked the purchasing power to stimulate the economy. This was not a problem that any individual cost-conscious capitalist had an interest in solving, but it was one that capital needed solved, and labor provided the solution. Unions demanded and got wage and benefit increases for their members, and thereby boosted aggregate demand. This gave firms markets for sales and reasons to invest. And that, in turn, increased productivity and lowered the costs of mass consumption goods, which was good for everyone. The alchemy of Keynesian economics translated worker interests into general interests; unions were the magicians. Male, pale, stale, stolid magicians—but still magicians.

What is the equivalent contribution in today's world, in which Keynesianism is qualified by international capital flows and product competition? It will likely come as much through "effective supply" as effective demand. What's that? Well, capitalism remains as anarchic as ever, and left to its own squabbling devices is ever more ruinous to our health. In response to increased competitive pressures, most U.S. firms have responded with "low-road" competitive strategies geared more to price reduction than quality improvement—strategies that have led to falling wages and rising inequality.

Whatever the prattle about our wage levels being set in Beijing, we know from other countries that this response is not dictated by the market. A "high-road" alternative is in fact available and viable under highly competitive conditions—a strategy that promises more enduring economic strength and higher living standards. Broadly described, this high road depends on generalizing a practice of nearly continuous innovation and productivity growth among firms and the substitution of quality-based competitive strategies for price-based ones. High-road restructuring is associated with better industrial relations, higher levels of worker involvement, a more democratic workplace, higher productivity and pay, vastly reduced environmental damage, and greater firm commitment to the health and stability of surrounding human communities—all happy outcomes for workers and American society in general, all immensely preferable to the low road alternative of sweated workers, economic insecurity, rising inequality, and degraded natural environments.

The problem is that the high road is generally not taken because the costs of moving to it are great, the supports aren't there, and it's too easy to make money taking the low road instead. We as a country have failed to close off the low road or to pave the high road.

That is what labor should do. That is its role. And—far more than any individual firm, or the government, or any other social force—it is uniquely positioned to play that role. It should declare itself the provider of "effective supply"—of demands on firm performance, and assists in meeting those demands under competitive conditions—for high-road production.

What could labor provide? Among the elements:

- a trained and motivated labor force, capable of sustaining the requirements of continuous innovation and high-involvement and high-responsibility forms of work organization;
- redesigned labor-market institutions providing clear labor-market signals to incumbent workers and new entrants, resources to permit their advance along career paths, and rewards

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for choosing the high road, so that they will in fact "buy in" to such advanced production;

- "bottom line" floors on wages and working conditions, and elimination of state subsidies to low-roading firms, to discourage pursuit of low road strategies;
- systems of employee management and industrial relations that promote labor-management cooperation and flexibility, thus capturing the full productivity potential of workers and enabling firms to plan ahead more efficiently;
- systems for rapid diffusion of new technology and high-performance forms of work organization;
- sources of "alternative" capital (beginning with labor's own) for such improvements, especially in most-needy areas neglected by a risk-averse and highly "impatient" private capital market;
- competent "public" (not necessarily government) capacities for the monitoring, enforcement, and efficient achievement of those aims under competitive conditions.

Labor, in short, should declare itself the conscience of the economy, the designer of a better order more respectful of human values, the savvy partner of progressive capital in advancing toward that order. It should not just concern itself with the distribution of economic opportunity and reward, but with the organization of production itself. And it should not just look to the state or employers, but to itself and allied communities, to make that economy perform to more demanding democratic standards.

Nice work if you can get it?

You can get it. But doing so requires breaking with routine.

The Old Model and the New

Postwar labor's organizational practice, often summarized as "traditional unionism," was defined by four basic elements.

Just Service, in Majority Settings. "Provide members with good wages and benefits and the unorganized will join up." This was the theory of growth that trade union leaders offered in the postwar period. With the exception of a 1960s explosion in the public sector, organizing expenditures as a percentage of total revenues stagnated or declined throughout the period. Union wages and benefits rose; but the new members did not come as fast as the old ones were lost. Where new units were targeted for organizing, the guiding idea was "first sign the contract, then keep the peace." The basic goal was majority status; dues were collected only after it was achieved, and union members were asked for little else. Where organizing failed to achieve majority support within a limited time, it was generally abandoned.

Staying Clear of Production Control. Encouraged by law and their own organizational sense, most unions steered clear of making demands on issues lying at the "core of entrepreneurial control." They reacted to the firm's decisions on training, technology, investment, relocation, product strategy, and work organization; they negotiated job descriptions; they engaged in "productivity bargaining" tying compensation to success in raising the rate of output. But they did not typically seek to take responsibility for steering the firm's product strategy or organizing the necessary inputs. Since unions were in a weaker position than employers, such assumption of responsibility was seen as promising *only* responsibility, never power, and blurring the distinction between "us" and "them" critical to maintaining union solidarity. Needless to say, the task of changing entire industry strategies was considered even more daunting and unattractive.

Centered on Specific Sites, and Not Coordinated. Despite lead agreements and pattern bargaining, collective bargaining agreements were generally negotiated on a firm by firm, and often plant by plant, basis. Contract administration was highly decentralized, with wide variation across sites. Within regional labor markets, there was little effort to generalize wage or benefit norms beyond organized employers. Efforts at multi-union bargaining, much less organizing, were infrequent. Murderous jurisdictional disputes were not. And if relations among unions were not close in regional labor markets, relations between the labor movement and community organizations were generally confined to charitable giving, with no coordi-

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nation of organizing strategies.

National Liberal Democrats or Bust. With very rare exceptions, unions were loyal supporters of the Democratic party and deeply hostile to independent politics. In contrast to the weight of union activity and need, political work—understood throughout as support for candidates—was also heavily skewed toward national, as against state or local, government.

This "traditional model" of unionism worked passably well—though chiefly for those already in unions—in a relatively closed economy, dominated by large and spatially concentrated firms, employing un- or semiskilled labor, composed overwhelmingly of men, and in a "nationalizing" state in which even Richard Nixon declared his loyalty to Keynes. But it works much less well in today's world, with lower average firm size, more dispersed production, a working class composed increasingly of minorities and women, firms subject to increased competition, and policy makers hostile to unions or utterly confused about the vital contribution organized workers can make to a productive economy.

More precisely, the traditional model is hopelessly expensive, and it doesn't produce active and engaged memberships. Particularly in large firms, the preoccupation with majority status imposes too demanding a condition of success, and slows the needed coordination across sites, regions, and even different branches of decentralized employers. It also fails to take advantage of opportunities for membership growth, since in virtually all workplaces some significant percentage of workers—typically, about 30 percent—wish to belong to unions. Economic restructuring has meanwhile made investment, relocation, technology, and training decisive for member well-being, the promotion of which requires that unions be as deeply involved in "baking" the pie as carving it up. Where unions can best do this, however, is less in the high politics of federal policy than the low politics of regional labor markets, where in any case their continued existence is unthinkable without substantial local political power. For both reasons, unions have found the need for closer strategic alliance with a range of community groups and populations (in particular, minority populations) traditionally operating at some distance from the labor movement. But this often sets them on a collision course with internationals much more interested in the next Congressional election, and a Democratic party that, at its best, provides real support only in the most visible races, and at its more frequent worst is hostile to the idea of building union power.

As a general matter, then, this traditional model should be turned on its head. That would mean:

"Everything that Moves" Organizing. Locally based organizing staffs and member organizers are cheaper and more effective than parachuting international representatives in. Imagine a union movement that fostered the development of *in situ* organizing capacity—among rank-and-file members, stewards, local unions—building on the one signal strength labor still has: the loyalty of its own people. With such a strategy, it becomes possible to contemplate truly long-term and large-scale campaigns and, within them, clearer focus on the real goal of organizing—which is not just to sign contracts but to build the union presence in the workplace. Employees in units still lacking majority status would be given the full rights and responsibilities of other union members and affiliated with the larger organizing machine. The job of "organizer" would become less "parachutist" and more "member of the community" —an on-the-scene full-time union activist. The organizer would help direct the training and administration of the local organizing machine, plan political supports for campaign efforts, and so on.

Seeking to Control the Terms of Production. In the supply-side kingdom, the bourgeoisie is king, but only if the serfs permit it. Operating across firms as well as within them, a union movement seriously interested in affecting the organization of work could in fact do so. Power in this area, moreover, could be bargained for power in decisions further back in the production chain—investment, new technology, and product strategy. And especially in the United States, where employer associations are not much more than trade associations, coordination across firms to supply the needed inputs for advanced production—regional training systems, one-stop shopping for labor-market ser-

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vices, intermediaries for economically targeted investment, modernization assistance of all kinds—is something that unions are uniquely positioned to provide. Imagine then, a labor movement that did provide them—but only to employers prepared to share power in decision making and comply with specified wage and production norms.

Spatial and Sectoral Coordination. If unions are to bring about these changes in large industries, those industries need to be organized, and growing variation across firms increasingly requires that organization really be "wall-to-wall"—every employee in a given firm should be organized, regardless of job category. Frequently, this simply cannot be done by a single union. Imagine, then, a labor movement that recognized this fact, and devised joint organizing strategies instead of policing existing jurisdictional boundaries. Recruited members could be divided up among cooperating unions or brought into a new pool jointly administered by those contributing to it. Unions should also cooperate in organizing regional labor markets. With critical mass provided by pooled resources, organizing campaigns are the natural complement to regional skills standards and other aspects of "effective supply" —especially in metropolitan labor markets—not least because they can foreclose the low-wage restructuring strategy that suppresses the demand it aims to meet. As regional labor bodies come to take a more active role in creating the infrastructure of advanced, high-wage, production, it would thus be natural for them also to assume supervision of such organizing, in a double-barreled strategy of imposing norms on the economy (and thus punishing "bad" firms) while assisting firms in meeting them (rewarding "good" firms).

Independent Politics. Finally, labor needs to be genuinely independent—governed in its political endorsements and supports not by party label but by the values and programs of those seeking its help. And it should invest heavily in developing its own capacity to shape the terms of political debate and action—spending less on "hand it over" PAC contributions to individual candidates and more on membership training, candidate recruitment (and more training) from within its own ranks, the development of precinct-based labor-neighbor political machines, and ongoing work with the progressive caucus of candidates elected. This effort would best be made where it was most feasible and traditionally neglected—in local and state politics. There, the costs of elections are infinitely cheaper, the offices at stake are of immediate relevance to improving labor's organizing terms (police that behave, local service agencies that respond, and so on), and the vast majority of offices (certainly 80 percent) are nonpartisan—so support for a more labor-friendly formation than the Democratic party need not even raise concerns about traditional national loyalties. For relatively modest expenditures, in most American cites, it would again be possible for labor to help set the public agenda.

Elements of Design

How can little labor begin to implement such a strategy? With care and targeting, through demonstration in selected sites, guided by the following principles:

Seek Leverage and Critical Mass in Sectors and Regional Labor Markets. With a long enough lever, you can move the world; in any campaign, you know you're winning when the opportunists climb on board. These two verities point to what should be an iron law of organizing: always devise strategies that exploit existing strengths while aiming for "critical mass" effects—sufficient numbers and momentum that the costs of offering support drop and the costs of not joining rise.

Often, of course, such critical mass is to be sought in industries or sectors characterized by many competing firms—and here the antecedents are so familiar as to hardly bear mention. A traditional goal of unions has been to "take wages out of competition," to make the costs of unionization felt by all competing firms. Competing firms should be indifferent between union-free and fully unionized environments; it is only the intermediate case—where unionization is a cost felt by some but not all competitors—that drives them to resist or roll back unionization. Even here, however, there are different incentives for employers depending on the extent of unionization. Imagine employer

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happiness as a U-curve, with the top left tail being the union-free environment and the top right one being the fully unionized, and the line on which the U sits describing increasing union density. Unions need to scramble hard to get to the bottom of the curve, and they can expect to do so over general employer opposition, but once a certain critical mass of unionization is reached they can expect something quite different: tacit or overt support from already unionized employers for extending the benefits of unionization to their rivals. The costs of new organizing drop sharply, making it possible to go wall-to-wall.

But while leverage and critical mass can be sought on a sector or employer basis, the most obvious place to seek them is within regional labor markets. It is there that the effects of unionization in one firm can be most easily leveraged to its neighbor, there that the effects of unionization in one sector can be most easily leveraged to another, there that the range of solidarity and service activities that would satisfy members without contracts are most easily and efficiently realized. And it is there that the distinctive modern contribution of unions to creating a "well-ordered economy" would first have to be realized: regional labor market boards and integrated human capital systems, modernization programs, a variety of public goods essential to the success of advanced firms and not capable of being produced by any one of them.

Integrate the Politics Throughout. Public power is needed to reduce organizing costs. It is hard to imagine the Hotel Workers' Las Vegas campaigns (or the Atlanta Central Labor Council campaign on Olympic work) without local political muscle, or UNITE's Dominican Republic success without the law, or a Justice For Janitors campaign with a completely hostile police presence. But national unions have been slow to take the point of this —slow to seek the political power, beneath the federal or even state level, that would most directly aid them in their organizing. Nor does the importance of politics consist only in the help that some power in the state may provide organizing. In today's world, no less than the old one, thinking of building a union movement as an essentially "economic" project distinct from a political one is like thinking about ice without water, or skiing without snow. Politics is necessary to lubricate the economic advance, and to define what that advance is about. Most abstractly, but necessary for labor to grasp, the economic project can only command popular support if it is a project that clearly embodies some broader notion of the social good. The signature of new labor is to institute higher standards and then help to enforce them. This is impossible without some measure of state power.

Pay-As-You-Go. Some unions have had success with "members only" representation—allowing individuals to join unions even before a majority of their co-workers have voted in favor of union representation. Of course, this strategy requires a break with the "contracts are us" model of unionism, a shift in the goal of organizing from serviced contracts per se to independent worker organizations that are durable and that grow before as well as after they reach contract. Given the plethora of unenforced labor regulations, bad management practices, and possibilities for alliance with others elsewhere in the improvement of workplace conditions, it is not so very hard to convince workers that they have something to gain from being in a union, even if a majority of their colleagues are not yet persuaded of that fact. A labor movement that turns away the energy and resources of such workers is wasting an obvious asset. Notice too that harnessing that asset would vastly extend the range of labor's reach. It would be, if not dominant everywhere, then at least present almost everywhere.

Concentrate on Cities. Put the pieces together, and what have you got as the natural targets for investment in organizing? First and foremost: cities and their metro regions. The degree to which the labor movement was always a distinctly metropolitan phenomenon is not widely enough appreciated in the labor movement. But union membership in metropolitan areas has always been, and continues to be, several times that of national levels, and it is the failure to preserve metropolitan unionization at critical mass levels that most explains

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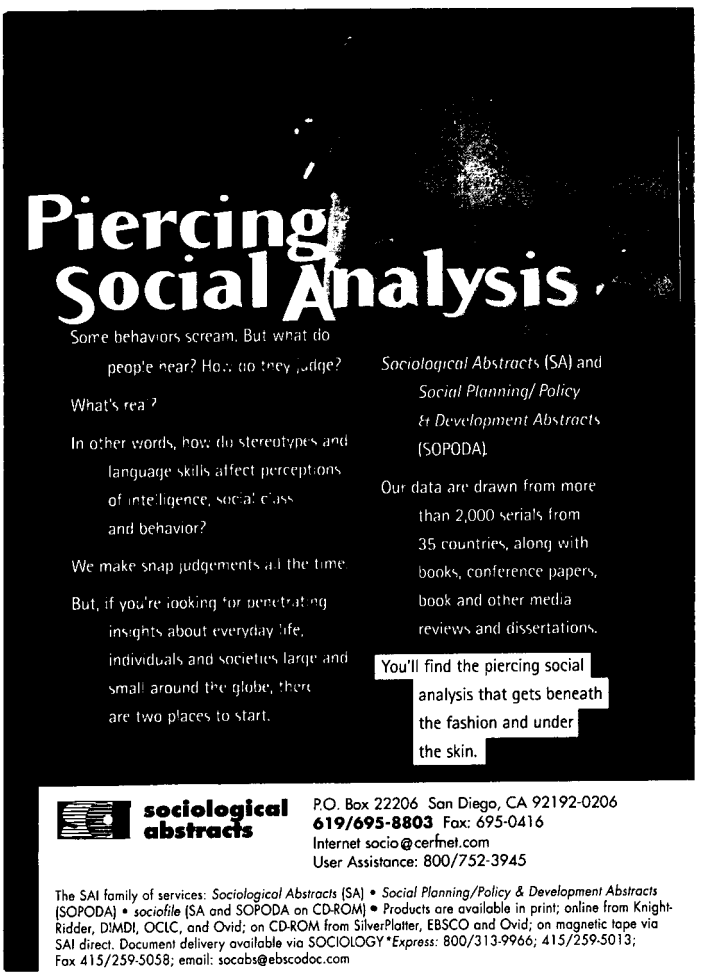
the collapse of traditional unionism. These are the most promising ruins from which to arise.

A labor movement that took these lessons seriously—concentrating resources in ten to fifteen metro areas, doing advanced political and strategic training of the most progressive local leaders, establishing independent political organizations, establishing genuine community unions with ties to its economic development work, concentrating organizing campaigns against partially organized local employers, and then seeking their aid to extend organization to rivals—would show explosive growth.

There is much else, of course, that labor needs to do. It's got to figure out a foreign policy in a world in which trade is organized to erode living standards rather than raise them and U.S. citizens continue to be denied the "peace dividend" they've paid for so many times. It's got to radicalize its own process of reform, with an overhaul of its decrepitly undemocratic procedures for electing leaders and making strategic choices. (We shall discuss these internal reforms in a future issue of *Dissent*.)

Mostly, however, labor needs to recognize, and act aggressively on the recognition, that it can in fact win again—in ways that build further success, and indeed that benefit from the help of the millions who would benefit from labor's revival—but that doing so requires more than leadership changes and diffuse goodwill and uplifted spirits. From a position of extreme weakness, with time running out, labor needs to show both the compelling promise of its long-term transformation, and short-term success consistent with it. Performing this two-step requires a vastly expanded social role and ruthless focus in spending the resources it has. □


Piercing Social Analysis
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What's real?
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Jo-Ann Mort

IMMIGRANT DREAMS: SWEATSHOP WORKERS SPEAK

Some conservatives complain that if immigrants want to live in this country, they should learn the language. Tell that to Aracely C., who has worked in the sweatshops of Los Angeles's garment industry for the thirteen years she has been here. She works seven days a week, more than twelve hours a day. "I have no time to learn English," she tells me as I sit with her and Leticia A. in the MacArthur Park headquarters of UNITE, the textile workers' union, just a few blocks from the nation's largest garment center.

Aracely's children speak English, but she's not home enough during their waking hours to learn the language from them. Her children—her son wants to be a policeman when he grows up and her daughter wants to be a lawyer—only speak to their mother in their native Spanish. She isn't even free on Sunday to take them to church or to the park. So how can she find the time to learn English?

Aracely earns an average of $80 a week. She is a presser, working on her feet all day, using an industrial iron. When the union organizer who is translating for us leaves the room, she communicates with me by rotating her hands, showing me the purple scars on her fingers from burns that weren't treated properly and the calluses on her palms. There is no first aid in her sewing shop; there is barely a bathroom—"You want to get out of there as quick as possible," she says through the translator as she describes the stench and the filth.

For six years, she worked for the Thai owners of the now notorious El Monte factories, which were exposed and shut down in 1995. A driver picked up workers from South Central at 6 A.M. for the drive to El Monte where they worked until 9 P.M. If the driver was in a bad mood, he would drive like crazy or be abusive to the workers. Sometimes his girlfriend came along and they fought in front of the workers. "We had to pay the consequences of his bad mood," Aracely says.

At the end of each week, they were paid in cash based on tags they handed in for each finished garment. The tags went to a supervisor—who made sure to take a cut for herself before giving the workers their money.

There are no such things a holidays in Aracely's world. She works on the Fourth of July, Christmas, and Good Friday. She tells me that when the workers asked if they could get off after 4 P.M. on Good Friday to go to church, the owner said, "Does God give you money? If you don't want to work, just tell me. I will find others." "They tell us: 'You come to this country to work. If you want to live like the rich, go back to your country,' " she says.

Aracely has another daughter in Mexico, in high school, who looks forward to going to college to become a doctor. The problem is that Aracely can't afford it, because even though the university is free, all the extras—including books—are beyond her means.

"I suffer a lot," she says as her eyes well up with tears. She stares into some vague distance. "I don't know how much longer I can do this," she says. She tells me that eight days after she had a cesarean, she was back at work because otherwise she would be fired. The doctor told her she needed a six-month hiatus from work. Because she didn't take proper rest, she had another operation to stop internal bleeding. Once

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Photo by Ed Carreón

again, she returned to work eight days later—and now she bleeds often. This last time, the boss called the hospital to make sure she wasn't lying about her illness. With no health insurance, she is dependent on the profoundly over-crowded LA County General. Her children have Medicaid because they were born here, though congressional action could take it away from them in the future.

Her husband also works in a sweatshop. The owner wants the workers to clock in two hours after they start working so he can steal two hours of their time. He can claim he is paying minimum wage; no one will know that the legal hourly wage has been stretched with all this free work. Her husband refused to do this. The owner called the police to throw him out of the shop. Now her husband is fighting to get his wages through the Justice Center, a workers' rights organization sponsored by UNITE and KIWA, the Korean Immigrant Workers Association.

I ask her what she wants for the future. "I want better treatment from employers to ensure at least the minimum wage. I feel like I'm killing myself. Every day I'm working harder and harder and making less and I'm running out of strength. I keep on struggling so my kids will have a better life and won't end up like me as a presser. That's all I want."

How does she get up day after day to this? "Every day I get up at four o'clock in the morning. At six thirty, I'm dropping off my kids at school. I pay someone to pick them up in the afternoon, but I suffer a lot. My worst nightmare is when a teacher wants to talk to me or I have to be at school at three o'clock and the employer wants his work done.

"We come here and they treat us like dogs," she tells me as she takes the tissue I give her to wipe away her tears from her bloodshot eyes.

"I'm always scared. The supervisor screams at me and I start remembering the others who were worse. When the woman raises her voice, I immediately start shaking because I am very scared. Sometimes, I get very, very desperate but I know I have to keep up the struggle because I have children. We suffer a lot in this country, too much. We will continue to struggle, see if we can get ahead."

Without documents, she has no other job possibilities. Once, she tried to get documents. She spent precious time and money to get the

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needed information, but when the time came, the immigration officer threw aside her papers. She can't afford the time or money to try again. Having been in Los Angeles for thirteen years, working every day, she is like thousands of others who are trapped in a never-never land of economic servitude.

Leticia A. is a bit luckier. A thirty-three year-old sewer, she has been in Los Angeles for nine years. In Mexico, she was a secretary, but has only worked in garment shops since coming to Los Angeles because she doesn't speak English.

Why did she come to the United States if she had a job as a secretary in Mexico City? "Because my husband came here," she tells me. "He was already here for three years so I had to follow him. He's a garment worker, like in Mexico—all his family worked in the garment industry."

Leticia is documented. "Last year, there was an immigration raid at the place where I work. They arrested us. I asked for a hearing to stop deportation. The Justice Center helped and now I do have my papers.

"They want to kill us for a little money," she says. "We don't have a guarantee even for a minimum wage. It's piecework rate. The owner, a woman, tries to cut the wages. We make reports every day of all the work we did and she'll look at our report and say, 'I already paid for this work,' or 'This isn't finished' or 'It's not done well.' Sometimes we'll work thirty-five to forty hours and get paid for twenty hours.

"When it rains, you have to cover yourself because the roof has a lot of holes. Rats come out. But the pressure is the worst. They won't even let you go to the bathroom—'I need this work and I need it now' they say."

Leticia's daughter wants to be a pediatrician and her son wants to be an engineer. "My kids can make it because they are very smart and we are trying our best—working in the factory and doing homework to have food on the table and pay the bills. We hope we can provide for them because they have the intelligence."

Though she works nine to five, she also brings work home. She goes to school to learn English every day after work from 6 P.M. to 8 P.M. After school, she sews her industrial homework until ten or eleven at night.

She has managed to save enough money to buy a car. "Little by little, I have set goals and met them," she explains. "My dream is to learn how to speak English and work as a secretary. I hope my kids do well and have their dreams realized."

The Los Angeles garment industry is largely nonunion. It is like a sponge that soaks up all available labor and especially thrives on illegal immigrants who—in this anti-immigrant environment—are more dependent on their bosses. They produce goods in what has become a more than $13.3 billion industry in Southern California. Virtually none of the legislation to tighten or discourage illegal immigration will do anything for the tens of thousands of illegal immigrants who already work in the Los Angeles area garment shops. About two-thirds of the sewing shops in L.A. are sweatshops. These are tiny shops, with a maximum of about fifty workers, that produce goods for name manufacturers or retailers. Many of them operate in full view of anyone who cares to look, especially in the downtown garment district in the shadow of the Convention Center.

Aracely tells me that she always takes home labels so that she knows where her clothes are bound. A group of sweatshop workers with the assistance of UNITE and KIWA have recently begun visiting the stores searching for their garments. Working with other activists, their strategy is to pressure the retailers not to sell goods made under illegal conditions. They know that if the stores insist on selling goods made in legal shops, their misery will end—and only then.

As I say goodbye to these workers, Aracely tells me that they—the workers—had to unite to stop these abuses. But in the present climate, I fear it will take more bravery than even these two brave women can muster. It will take unionization and government intervention. It will take a changed public atmosphere, in which immigrant workers who make a contribution to our economy are no longer demonized. It will also take outraged consumers to hold the garment industry responsible for the economic servitude upon which many retailers and manufacturers make their profits. □

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Joseph Blasi

A PROGRESSIVE PRIVATIZATION PLAN FOR AMTRAK

Perhaps rail transportation should be treated as a public good and subsidized by the state. But the hard truth is that Amtrak subsidies are going down and will soon disappear. On September 21, 1995, the House Transportation Committee approved a $712 million annual subsidy for Amtrak until 1998. The subsidy will be cut to $403 million in 1999. Amtrak says that it has an agreement with Congress that its subsidy will be ended by the year 2002. Privatization is no longer a theoretical subject for right-wing economists or young Republicans. Job security, potential growth, the very possibility of a passenger railroad in the United States—all depend on finding a different way of structuring Amtrak. If one accepts the notion that the United States will certainly not have a more liberal president than Bill Clinton before the year 2001, and recognizes that increased funding for Amtrak has not been a priority even for the Clinton administration, then one arrives at a tough conclusion: we had better start talking about the future of Amtrak or there will be no future. But this challenge is also an opportunity—to work out what I want to call a social form of privatization. Here is a plan to rescue Amtrak that takes account of the interests of citizens, the riding public, Amtrak's employees, and their unions.

Amtrak As It Is

Amtrak has 23,600 employees and serves 530 cities in 45 states. It is not a railroad in the traditional sense; it does not own thousands of acres of land and lots of trackage; it is mainly an owner of train stations, yards, and trains. Although its trains travel over 23,800 route miles, most of the tracks belong to the big freight railroads. The company pays a fee to use these tracks. Amtrak owns only 770 miles of track, mostly in the Northeast. As a former president of the United Airlines Pilots union once said in discussing the employee buyout of United, "United is simply a bunch of flying aluminum tubes, a pile of computers, and tens of thousands of employees who make it work. It is people and technology that make this airline." Amtrak is a similar case—but it's not working.

Amtrak needed $2.5 billion to operate in 1995; its sales amounted to about $1.5 billion and it had federal subsidies of about $1 billion. Taxpayers contributed $392 million to keep the railroad operating, $230 million for its capital improvements, $200 million to upgrade the Northeast corridor, $150 million to help the railroad retirement fund, and about $40 million for a special project involving a reorganization of activities in New York.

What have U.S. taxpayers and Amtrak employees received for a subsidy that amounts to $1 for every $1.50 Amtrak takes in and $42,372 for each of Amtrak's employees? The average age of the system's locomotives at the end of last year was an astounding 13.4 years. And the average age of passenger cars was 22.4 years. Seeing these figures helps explain why Amtrak equipment feels so bumpy and out of date. From 1993 to 1994, employee injuries went up, passenger miles went down, and the railroad's yield—its revenue per passenger mile—went down.

Amtrak's on-time performance has gone down significantly since 1984 on both long-distance and short-distance runs. Its equipment

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malfunctions and passenger delays have drastically increased. And the delays specifically due to Amtrak, as against those due to freight trains or other causes, have skyrocketed. The total number of hours of en-route delay has almost doubled since 1988. Amtrak's own measures of its economic efficiency are not encouraging. From 1993 to 1994, the money it spends to carry a passenger one mile went up and the money it makes on a sale of one passenger mile went down. (To be fair, despite recent accidents, passenger safety has improved over all and grade-crossing accidents are down.) Meanwhile, conversations with regular Amtrak employees suggest that they feel demoralized, abandoned by Congress, picked on by angry passengers, deeply critical of Amtrak management.

What Is Amtrak's Problem?

First, Amtrak is mismanaged. A well-managed company is a company whose performance is constantly improving. Amtrak's managers and its culture of management are not up to the job. The expense to take a passenger one mile did not go up only between 1993 and 1994; it has been rising since 1985. True, the contribution to Amtrak's sales of one passenger traveling one mile has risen, but this may reflect nothing more than Amtrak's ability to raise its prices—because many passengers have no alternative transportation. Amtrak's management spends a lot of time playing politics to increase its subsidies, but this does not require the same skills that help customers or build railroads. I do not know if it is better management or higher subsidies that make the state-run passenger railroads of Western Europe more pleasant and more efficient than Amtrak. Whatever the answer, the current level of very high subsidies for Amtrak has definitely not yielded a railroad of European standard, and subsidies here are sure to decline.

Second, Amtrak's labor costs are quite high relative to the impact on the customer and the level of subsidies. In 1994, Amtrak spent $1.3 billion on employee wages, benefits, and retirement, while all train operations accounted for only $510 million. Leaving aside any detailed comparison with other companies, if a customer service like a railroad spends almost three times more on its employees than on the cost of its actual product, I would expect them to provide the very best service. I don't question the right of workers to a good union salary and benefits and health care. But for that kind of money, for a subsidy amounting to more than $42,000 per employee per year, for compensation costs that exceed the expenses of the company by 50 percent and equal its entire revenue, Amtrak must be more accountable. And where are Amtrak's unions? The public never hears their views. They have a responsibility to join in a public debate that extends far beyond the question of subsidies. Union leaders should be involved in choosing a new management team that can take workers with good salaries and benefits and help them build a great railroad.

Third, Amtrak is a poorly structured organization; it is not governed properly. The idea that spinning Amtrak off as a passenger line would allow it to operate as a semi-private corporation and make money, improve services, become more market-oriented, has ended in failure. The plan did not turn Amtrak around. Yes, other countries manage to subsidize their railroads and get good management, on-time performance, and a generally higher standard of service. Maybe Amtrak should be contracted out to a French, German, Swiss, or Austrian railroad. Since that's not likely, it needs instead to be managed for accountability as a private or social corporation by a truly independent board of directors that will hire and fire its senior management based on performance.

"Social" Privatization

Amtrak can only be saved if its need for subsidies is reduced drastically and an incentive provided to its management and employees to participate in its restructuring. This is not a pipe dream. In the late eighties, the railroad unions, the U.S. government, and investment bankers privatized and restructured Conrail with a 25 percent employee ownership and the largest initial public offering of stock in U.S. history to date. (Conrail turned out to be moderately profitable.) Years of subsidized bureaucracy have made Amtrak's employees and unions absolutely necessary participants in the company's reorga-

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nization. But they must wake up and realize that they are not going to solve the railroad's problems simply by protecting their existing turf and attempting to increase subsidies.

The general outline for the restructuring of Amtrak should be provided by the U.S. Congress in a new piece of legislation initiated by the president—a bill for Privatizing Amtrak Through Employee Ownership and Citizen Equity. This bill should legalize the privatization of Amtrak according to a plan that ends subsidies in two years as an incentive for all concerned parties to move quickly. The idea of using employee ownership to help restructure a company was notably and successfully applied in the rescue of the Chrysler Corporation in the eighties. Members of the United Auto Workers and managers received 25 percent of the company's stock in return for flexibility in wages and work rules. The restructuring of Amtrak should proceed according to the following steps.

First, Amtrak should take the United Airlines or the Northwest Airlines employee buyout as its general model for privatization, and it should give all parties incentives to run an efficient operation. The current board of directors should immediately be replaced by a new independent board committed to this plan, chosen from the world's top experts in the technologies, systems, and management of railroads and transportation services. This board should engage an investment banker and railroad consultant who will design the details of the restructuring. The members of the new board should be well compensated, but at least half of their compensation should be tied up in Amtrak stock so that they have the same incentive as workers and managers to make the railroad succeed.

Second, the railroad unions should also hire an investment banker and begin their own design of a restructuring plan. This is what the unions did in the Conrail, United, and Northwest Airlines employee ownership reorganizations, and unions now know how to do this. The employees of the railroad should be offered 30 percent to 51 percent of the new private company in return for a collective bargaining agreement that trades some current compensation, future wage increases, flexibility on work rules and employee staffing (not related to safety), and retirement benefit increases for Amtrak stock. The ultimate amount of employee ownership should depend on the value of employee investments. If the restructuring plan calls for any downsizing, this should be implemented before the company is privatized as part of the new labor agreement. Amtrak employees' future wage increases should be tied partly to the performance of the stock and partly to productivity improvements. Amtrak management's compensation should be heavily in stock that goes up if the company does well. The goal of all these exchanges is to reduce compensation as a percentage of Amtrak's annual budget by turning managers and employees into owners who can share in its success. Amtrak's employees should also be allowed to borrow capital to buy additional stock through a leveraged Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP: this is simply an employee trust that borrows money from a bank backed up by a company guarantee; the loan is paid back out of profits). This capital will be used to help renovate the railroad.

Third, labor and the transitional board of directors should agree on a restructuring plan to make Amtrak into a for-profit corporation. When the agreement with Amtrak's unions is complete, the Amtrak board should be restructured to include union representatives. Union participation in the governance of Amtrak is both the right of the new employee shareholders and an economic necessity to make sure that the new board is in touch with reality and supports labor-management cooperation. This is exactly what the United Airlines board is doing today. Financial restructuring will include raising funds from the sale of Amtrak's properties and deciding on other ways to employ Amtrak's assets. Before Amtrak's privatization, the board should sell whatever fixed assets and properties are not absolutely necessary for the operation of the railroad. Because Amtrak rents its tracks, it should operate with a minimum of real estate. To the greatest extent possible, it should rent its yards and space in its stations. This income should be

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used to create a capital investment fund that can be used to renovate the railroad.

Fourth, the other 49 percent to 70 percent of Amtrak should be distributed to the American public. A portion of the ownership of Amtrak should be provided in stock to some households within and below the middle-class income range as a form of tax cut. American taxpayers provided subsidies for years to Amtrak and thus earned some ownership of its assets. This will partially pay them back. It will also create an interest in the company and encourage the use of its services by a large part of the population. These citizen shareholders will be required to group their shares in Amtrak Investment Funds licensed by the U.S. Government. Funds that collect large amounts of shares will be able to seek seats on the Amtrak board and nominate professional money managers who will monitor the investment and continue the work of restructuring the railroad. Another portion of Amtrak's stock will be sold to the public for cash in order to raise more funds for renovation.

Fifth, the business and employee and customer cultures of Amtrak should be changed by the new board and the unions. Management should be hired to develop a business culture whose goal is the attainment of Swiss efficiency and constantly improving performance. The employee culture should be one of accountability and participation, so that employees recognize themselves as stockholders who have a role in the company and whose stock increases in value if the company succeeds, and as managers whose compensation is based on their performance. One important change in the employee culture should be the cutting of supervision where it does not have an impact on safety. Unionized workplaces are traditionally over-supervised because of distrust between labor and management. In the new Amtrak, unnecessary supervisors can be moved into sales, ticketing, and other jobs related to making money and providing services. Pleasing passengers should be the goal of this new organization. And passengers will be both riders and stockholders.

Is This For Real?

The success of the employee buyouts at United Airlines and Northwest Airlines and the use of employee ownership in Chrysler bode well for the Amtrak privatization. And the rail unions worked with these same ideas at Conrail. The two most difficult challenges are more explicitly political. First, this plan will challenge what is likely still to be a Republican Congress—whose members believe that privatization must be anti-union—to come up with a plan that includes employees as important participants. And second, Amtrak's current management is now trying to hide its incompetence behind a new subsidy. It wants to persuade the Congress to take a half-cent gasoline tax out of the highway trust fund and give it on an annual basis to Amtrak. *Congressional Quarterly* has reported:

> This move is vehemently opposed by road builders, car and oil companies, as well as trucking companies...On the Senate side, the Senate Commerce Committee on July 20 approved an unnumbered bill that would scale back Amtrak's subsidies while attempting to find new sources of revenues. The Senate measure would transfer half a cent of the federal tax on each gallon of motor fuels to a new Amtrak account, one reserved for capital investments such as new engines and train stations. In the past, that money had gone to reduce the federal deficit, but it was scheduled to shift into the account that funds mass-transit subsidies on Oct. 1.

Amtrak's managers cannot be expected to make the railroad more efficient while they are campaigning to get $600 million in new subsidies. Nor will the campaign succeed in the current political climate. Unions especially must recognize that allowing free rein to the entrenched Amtrak management is simply giving up on job security and future income flow. It is strange that in the guise of opposing privatization, Amtrak's unions are really putting control over their members' future into the hands of a radically inefficient management.

What should be done if the most cogent financial experts agree that Amtrak cannot exist without some infusion of federal capital? Clearly, subsidies will not continue in their current form.

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The data show that their impact, under American conditions, is negative. They distort the incentive to run the railroad properly. They do not help customers get service, they do not encourage management to manage, they do not create a future for employees. And the half cent gasoline tax should never be allowed to replace subsidies for a poorly managed railroad. If anything, the gasoline tax is worse than a subsidy that is debated each year by Congress because, as a permanent funded tax, it never needs debating; it is entirely divorced from the regular democratic process.

If investment funds are necessary after the privatization plan is implemented, then Amtrak should receive a subsidy similar to that given to the highway system, and the transfer of money should be structured in one or both of the following ways. One: every dollar provided to Amtrak should be an investment in newly issued stock that is then distributed to American citizens as an extension of the middle- and working-class tax cut already described. This stock can be sold on the market for cash or held as an investment. Obviously, the more subsidies Amtrak receives under this system, the more the stock ownership of Amtrak's board members, managers, and employees will be diluted. There cannot be a better incentive to make Amtrak succeed than to tie every dollar of future subsidy to the disappearance of the greatest opportunity to own capital assets that Amtrak's managers and employees will ever have. Two: no subsidies should be given for operating costs or compensation, but the government may have to help with capital improvements such as railbeds or equipment. But all those capital assets should be grouped into a Railroad Capital Assets Leasing Corporation whose stock, again, should be distributed to American citizens. Amtrak can rent these assets.

Amtrak is no good to anyone unless it is efficient in serving its passengers, accountable to the American public, and fair to its workers. □

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Alan D. Sokal

TRANSGRESSING THE BOUNDARIES: AN AFTERWORD

Two years ago, Alan Sokal, a physicist at New York University, submitted to the editors of Social Text *a parody of "postmodernist" studies of natural science. The piece was accepted as a serious contribution to the debate about reason, objectivity, realism, and perspectivism, and published in the Spring/Summer 1996 issue of* Social Text, *devoted to the "Science Wars." Sokal then "exposed" the hoax in an article in* Lingua Franca *(May/June 1996), provoking a new debate, to which many scientists, social scientists, and philosophers have contributed. At the same time, Sokal sent* Social Text *an "Afterword," providing his own account of the political significance of the debate and inviting a response from the editors.* Social Text *declined to publish the piece, and Sokal sent it to us. We print it here because we think that the political issues are both engrossing and important. The editors of* Social Text, *and anyone else with an interest in the politics of postmodernism and of modern science, are invited to respond.* — EDS.

Les grandes personnes sont décidement bien bizarres, se dit le petit prince.
—Antoine de Saint Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*

Alas, the editors of *Social Text* have discovered that my article, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," which appeared in *Social Text* #46/47, is a parody. In view of the important intellectual and political issues raised by this episode, I have written this (non-parodic) Afterword, in which I explain my motives and my true views.[1] One of my goals is to make a small contribution toward a dialogue on the left between humanists and natural scientists—"two cultures" that contrary to some optimistic pronouncements (mostly by the former group) are probably farther apart in mentality than at any time in the past fifty years.

Like the genre it is meant to satirize—myriad exemplars of which can be found in my reference list—my article is a mélange of truths, half-truths, quarter-truths, falsehoods, non sequiturs, and syntactically correct sentences that have no meaning whatsoever. (Sadly, there are only a handful of the latter: I tried hard to produce them, but I found that, save for rare bursts of inspiration, I just didn't have the knack.) I also employed some other strategies that are well established (albeit sometimes inadvertently) in the genre: appeals to authority in lieu of logic, speculative theories passed off as established science, strained and even absurd analogies, rhetoric that sounds good but whose meaning is ambiguous, and confusion between the technical and everyday senses of English words.[2] (N.B. All works cited in my article are real, and all quotations are rigorously accurate; none are invented.)

But why did I do it? I confess that I'm an unabashed Old Leftist who never quite understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class. And I'm a stodgy old scientist who believes, naïvely, that there exists an external world, that there exist objective truths about that world, and that my job is to discover

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some of them. (If science were merely a negotiation of social conventions about what is agreed to be "true," why would I bother devoting a large fraction of my all-too-short life to it? I don't aspire to be the Emily Post of quantum field theory.[3])

But my main concern isn't to defend science from the barbarian hordes of lit crit (we'll survive just fine, thank you). Rather, my concern is explicitly *political*: to combat a currently fashionable postmodernist/poststructuralist/social-constructivist discourse—and more generally a penchant for subjectivism—which is, I believe, inimical to the values and future of the left.[4]

Alan Ryan said it well:

> It is, for instance, pretty suicidal for embattled minorities to embrace Michel Foucault, let alone Jacques Derrida. The minority view was always that power could be undermined by truth . . . . Once you read Foucault as saying that truth is simply an effect of power, you've had it . . . . But American departments of literature, history and sociology contain large numbers of self-described leftists who have confused radical doubts about objectivity with political radicalism, and are in a mess.[5]

Likewise, Eric Hobsbawm has decried

> the rise of "postmodernist" intellectual fashions in Western universities, particularly in departments of literature and anthropology, which imply that all "facts" claiming objective existence are simply intellectual constructions. In short, that there is no clear difference between fact and fiction. But there is, and for historians, even for the most militantly antipositivist ones among us, the ability to distinguish between the two is absolutely fundamental.[6]

(Hobsbawm goes on to show how rigorous historical work can refute the fictions propounded by reactionary nationalists in India, Israel, the Balkans, and elsewhere.)

And finally, Stanislav Andreski:

> So long as authority inspires awe, confusion and absurdity enhance conservative tendencies in society. Firstly, because clear and logical thinking leads to a cumulation of knowledge (of which the progress of the natural sciences provides the best example) and the advance of knowledge sooner or later undermines the traditional order. Confused thinking, on the other hand, leads nowhere in particular and can be indulged indefinitely without producing any impact upon the world.[7]

As an example of "confused thinking," I would like to consider a chapter from Sandra Harding's *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* entitled "Why 'Physics' Is a Bad Model for Physics." I select this example both because of Harding's prestige in certain (but by no means all) feminist circles, and because her essay is (unlike much of this genre) very clearly written. Harding wishes to answer the question, "Are feminist criticisms of Western thought relevant to the natural sciences?" She does so by raising, and then rebutting, six "false beliefs" about the nature of science. Some of her rebuttals are perfectly well-taken; but they don't prove anything like what she claims they do. That is because she conflates five quite distinct issues:

- **Ontology.** What objects *exist* in the world? What statements about these objects are *true*?
- **Epistemology.** How can human beings obtain *knowledge* of truths about the world? How can they assess the *reliability* of that knowledge?
- **Sociology of knowledge.** To what extent are the truths *known* (or *knowable*) by humans in any given society influenced (or determined) by social, economic, political, cultural, and ideological factors? Same question for the false statements erroneously believed to be true.
- **Individual ethics.** What types of research *ought* a scientist (or technologist) to undertake (or refuse to undertake)?
- **Social ethics.** What types of research *ought* society to encourage, subsidize, or publicly fund (or alternatively to discourage, tax, or forbid)?

These questions are obviously related—for example, if there are no objective truths about the world, then there isn't much point in asking how one can know those (nonexistent) truths—but they are conceptually distinct.

For example, Harding (citing Forman 1987) points out that American research in the 1940s and 1950s on quantum electronics was motivated in large part by potential military appli-

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cations. True enough. Now, quantum mechanics made possible solid-state physics, which in turn made possible quantum electronics (for example, the transistor), which made possible nearly all of modern technology (for example, the computer).[8] And the computer has had applications that are beneficial to society (such as allowing the postmodern cultural critic to produce her articles more efficiently) as well as applications that are harmful (such as allowing the U.S. military to kill human beings more efficiently). This raises a host of social and individual ethical questions: Ought society to forbid (or discourage) certain applications of computers? Forbid (or discourage) research on computers *per se*? Forbid (or discourage) research on quantum electronics? On solid-state physics? On quantum mechanics? And likewise for individual scientists and technologists. (Clearly, an affirmative answer to these questions becomes harder to justify as one goes down the list; but I do not want to declare any of these questions *a priori* illegitimate.) Likewise, sociological questions arise, for example: To what extent is our (true) knowledge of computer science, quantum electronics, solid-state physics, and quantum mechanics—and our lack of knowledge about other scientific subjects, for example, the global climate—a result of public-policy choices favoring militarism? To what extent have the erroneous theories (if any) in computer science, quantum electronics, solid-state physics, and quantum mechanics been the result (in whole or in part) of social, economic, political, cultural and ideological factors, in particular the culture of militarism?[9]

These are all serious questions, which deserve careful investigation adhering to the highest standards of scientific and historical evidence. *But they have no effect whatsoever on the underlying scientific questions*: whether atoms (and silicon crystals, transistors, and computers) really do behave according to the laws of quantum mechanics (and solid-state physics, quantum electronics, and computer science). The militaristic orientation of American science has quite simply no bearing whatsoever on the ontological question, and only under a wildly implausible scenario could it have any bearing on the epistemological question. (For example, if the worldwide community of solid-state physicists, following what it believes to be the conventional standards of scientific evidence, were to hastily accept an erroneous theory of semiconductor behavior because of its enthusiasm for the breakthrough in military technology that this theory would make possible.)

Social Text editor Andrew Ross has drawn an analogy between the hierarchical taste cultures (high, middlebrow, and popular) familiar to cultural critics, and the demarcation between science and pseudoscience.[10] At a sociological level this is an incisive observation, but at an ontological and epistemological level it is simply absurd. Ross seems to recognize this, because he immediately says:

> I do not want to insist on a literal interpretation of this analogy. . . . A more exhaustive treatment would take account of the local, qualifying differences between the realm of cultural taste and that of science [!], but it would run up, finally, against the stand-off between the empiricist's claim that non-context-dependent beliefs exist and that they can be true, and the culturalist's claim that beliefs are only socially accepted as true.[11]

But such epistemological agnosticism simply won't suffice, at least not for people who aspire to make social change. Deny that non-context-dependent assertions can be true, and you don't just throw out quantum mechanics and molecular biology: you also throw out the Nazi gas chambers, the American enslavement of Africans, and the fact that today in New York it's raining. Hobsbawm is right: facts do matter, and some facts (like the first two cited here) matter a great deal.

Still, Ross is correct that, at a sociological level, maintaining the demarcation line between science and pseudoscience serves—*among other things*—to maintain the social power of those who, whether or not they have formal scientific credentials, stand on science's side of the line. (It has *also* served to increase the mean life expectancy in the United States from forty-seven years to seventy-six years in less than a century.[12]) Ross notes,

> Cultural critics have, for some time now, been faced with the task of exposing similar vested in-

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> stitutional interests in the debates about class, gender, race, and sexual preference that touch upon the demarcations between taste cultures, and I see no ultimate reason for us to abandon our hard-earned skepticism when we confront science.[13]

Fair enough: scientists are in fact the *first* to advise skepticism in the face of other people's (and one's own) truth claims. But a sophomoric skepticism, a bland (or blind) agnosticism, won't get you anywhere. Cultural critics, like historians or scientists, need an *informed* skepticism, one that can evaluate evidence and logic and come to reasoned (albeit tentative) judgments *based on that evidence and logic.*

At this point Ross may object that I am rigging the power game in my own favor: how is he, a professor of American studies, to compete with me, a physicist, in a discussion of quantum mechanics?[14] (Or even of nuclear power—a subject on which I have no expertise whatsoever.) But it is equally true that I would be unlikely to win a debate with a professional historian on the causes of World War I. Nevertheless, as an intelligent lay person with a modest knowledge of history, I am capable of evaluating the evidence and logic offered by competing historians and of coming to some sort of reasoned (albeit tentative) judgment. (Without that ability, how could any thoughtful person justify being politically active?)

The trouble is that few non-scientists in our society feel this self-confidence when dealing with scientific matters. As C.P. Snow observed in his famous "Two Cultures" lecture thirty-five years ago:

> A good many times I have been present at gatherings of people who, by the standards of the traditional culture, are thought highly educated and who have with considerable gusto been expressing their incredulity at the illiteracy of scientists. Once or twice I have been provoked and have asked the company how many of them could describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The response was cold: it was also negative. Yet I was asking something which is about the scientific equivalent of: *Have you read a work of Shakespeare's*?
>
> I now believe that if I had asked an even simpler question—such as, What do you mean by mass, or acceleration, which is the scientific

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equivalent of saying, *Can you read?*—not more than one in ten of the highly educated would have felt that I was speaking the same language. So the great edifice of modern physics goes up, and the majority of the cleverest people in the western world have about as much insight into it as their neolithic ancestors would have had.[15]

A lot of the blame for this state of affairs rests, I think, with the scientists. The teaching of mathematics and science *is* often authoritarian[16] and this is antithetical not only to the principles of radical/democratic pedagogy but to the principles of science itself. No wonder most Americans can't distinguish between science and pseudoscience: their science teachers have never given them any rational grounds for doing so. (Ask an average undergraduate: Is matter composed of atoms? Yes. Why do you think so? The reader can fill in the response.) Is it then any surprise that 36 percent of Americans believe in telepathy, and that 47 percent believe in the creation account of Genesis?[17]

As Ross has noted,[18] many of the central political issues of the coming decades—from health care to global warming to third world development—depend in part on subtle (and hotly debated) questions of scientific fact. But they don't depend only on scientific fact: they depend also on ethical values and—in this journal it hardly needs to be added—on naked economic interests. No left can be effective unless it takes seriously questions of scientific fact *and* of ethical values *and* of economic interests. The issues at stake are too important to be left to the capitalists or to the scientists—or to the postmodernists.

A quarter-century ago, at the height of the U.S. invasion of Vietnam, Noam Chomsky observed that

> George Orwell once remarked that political thought, especially on the left, is a sort of masturbation fantasy in which the world of fact hardly matters. That's true, unfortunately, and it's part of the reason that our society lacks a genuine, responsible, serious left-wing movement.[19]

Perhaps that's unduly harsh, but there's unfortunately a significant kernel of truth in it. Nowadays the erotic text tends to be written in (broken) French rather than Chinese, but the real-life consequences remain the same. Here's Alan Ryan in 1992, concluding his wry analysis of American intellectual fashions with a lament that:

> the number of people who combine intellectual toughness with even a modest political radicalism is pitifully small. Which, in a country that has George Bush as President and Danforth Quayle lined up for 1996, is not very funny.[20]

Four years later, with Bill Clinton installed as our supposedly "progressive" president and Newt Gingrich already preparing for the new millennium, it still isn't funny. □

Notes

[1] Readers are cautioned not to infer my views on any subject except insofar as they are set forth in this Afterword. In particular, the fact that I have parodied an extreme or ambiguously stated version of an idea does not exclude that I may agree with a more nuanced or precisely stated version of the same idea.

[2] For example: "linear," "nonlinear," "local," "global," "multidimensional," "relative," "frame of reference," "field," "anomaly," "chaos," "catastrophe," "logic," "irrational," "imaginary," "complex," "real," "equality," "choice."

[3] By the way, anyone who believes that the laws of physics are mere social conventions is invited to try transgressing those conventions from the windows of my apartment. I live on the twenty-first floor. (P.S. I am aware that this wisecrack is unfair to the more sophisticated relativist philosophers of science, who will concede that e*mpirical statements* can be objectively true—for example, the fall from my window to the pavement will take approximately 2.5 seconds—but claim that the *theoretical explanations* of those empirical statements are more-or-less arbitrary social constructions. I think that this view is also largely wrong, but that is a much longer discussion.)

[4] The natural sciences have little to fear, at least in the short run, from postmodernist silliness; it is, above all, history and the social sciences—and leftist politics—that suffer when verbal game-playing displaces the rigorous analysis of social realities. Nevertheless, because of the limitations of my own expertise, my analysis here will be restricted to the natural sciences (and indeed primarily to the physical sciences). While the basic epistemology of inquiry ought to be roughly the same for the natural and social sciences, I am of course perfectly aware that many special (and very difficult) methodological issues arise in the social sciences from the fact that the objects of inquiry are human beings (including their subjective states of mind); that these objects of inquiry have intentions (including in some cases the concealment of evidence or the placement of deliberately self-serving evidence); that the evidence is expressed (usually) in human language whose meaning may be ambiguous; that the meaning of conceptual categories (for ex-

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ample, childhood, masculinity, femininity, family, economics, etc.) changes over time; that the goal of historical inquiry is not just facts but interpretation, etc. So by no means do I claim that my comments about physics should apply directly to history and the social sciences. To say that "physical reality is a social and linguistic construct" is just plain silly, but to say that "social reality is a social and linguistic construct" is virtually a tautology.

[5] Ryan (1992).

[6] Hobsbawm (1993, 63).

[7] Andreski (1972, 90).

[8] Computers existed prior to solid-state technology, but they were unwieldy and slow. The 486 PC sitting today on the literary theorist's desk is roughly a thousand times more powerful than the room-sized vacuum-tube computer IBM 704 from 1954 (see e.g. Williams 1985).

[9] I certainly don't exclude the possibility that *present* theories in any of these subjects might be erroneous. But critics wishing to make such a case would have to provide not only historical evidence of the claimed cultural influence, but also *scientific* evidence that the theory in question is in fact erroneous. (The same evidentiary standards of course apply to *past* erroneous theories; but in this case the scientists may have already performed the second task, relieving the cultural critic of the need to do so from scratch.)

[10] Ross (1991, 25-26); also in Ross (1992, 535-536).

[11] Ross (1991, 26); also in Ross (1992, 535). In the discussion following this paper, Ross (1992, 549) expressed further (and quite justified) misgivings:

> I'm quite skeptical of the "anything goes" spirit that is often the prevailing climate of relativism around postmodernism . . . . Much of the postmodernist debate has been devoted to grappling with the philosophical or cultural limits to the grand narratives of the Enlightenment. If you think about ecological questions in this light, however, then you are talking about "real" physical, or material, limits to our resources for encouraging social growth. And postmodernism, as we know, has been loath to address the "real," except to announce its banishment.

[12] U.S. Bureau of the Census (1975, 47, 55; 1994, 87). In 1900 the mean life expectancy at birth was 47.3 years (47.6 years for whites, and a shocking 33.0 years for "Negro and other"). In 1995 it is 76.3 years (77.0 years for whites, 70.3 years for blacks).

I am aware that this assertion is likely to be misinterpreted, so let me engage in some pre-emptive clarification. I am *not* claiming that all of the increase in life expectancy is due to advances in scientific *medicine*. A large fraction (possibly the dominant part) of the increase—especially in the first three decades of the twentieth century—is due to the general improvement in the standards of housing, nutrition, and public sanitation (the latter two informed by improved scientific understanding of the etiology of infectious and dietary-deficiency diseases). [For reviews of the evidence, see e.g. Holland *et al.* (1991).] But—without discounting the role of social struggles in these improvements, particularly as concerns the narrowing of the racial gap—the underlying and overwhelming cause of these improvements is quite obviously the vast increase in the material standard of living over the past century, by more than a factor of five (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, 224-225; 1994, 451). And this increase is quite obviously the direct result of science, as embodied in technology.

[13] Ross (1991, 26); also in Ross (1992, 536).

[14] By the way, intelligent non-scientists seriously interested in the conceptual problems raised by quantum mechanics need no longer rely on the vulgarizations (in both senses) published by Heisenberg, Bohr, and sundry physicists and New Age authors. The little book of Albert (1992) provides an impressively serious and *intellectually honest* account of quantum mechanics and the philosophical issues it raises—yet it requires no more mathematical background than a modicum of high-school algebra, and does not require any prior knowledge of physics. The main requirement is a willingness to think *slowly* and *clearly*.

[15] Snow (1963, 20-21). One significant change has taken place since C.P. Snow's time: while humanist intellectuals' ignorance about (for example) mass and acceleration remains substantially unchanged, nowadays a significant minority of humanist intellectuals feels entitled to pontificate on these subjects in spite of their ignorance (perhaps trusting that their readers will be equally ignorant). Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a recent book on *Rethinking Technologies*, edited by the Miami Theory Collective and published by the University of Minnesota Press: "it now seems appropriate to reconsider the notions of acceleration and deceleration (what physicists call positive and negative speeds)" (Virilio 1993, 5). The reader who does not find this uproariously funny (as well as depressing) is invited to sit in on the first two weeks of Physics I.

[16] I wasn't joking about that [in my *Social Text* article]. For anyone who is interested in my views, I would be glad to provide a copy of Sokal (1987). For another sharp critique of the poor teaching of mathematics and science, see (irony of ironies) Gross and Levitt (1994, 23-28).

[17] Telepathy: Hastings and Hastings (1992, 518), American Institute of Public Opinion poll from June 1990. Concerning "telepathy, or communication between minds without using the traditional five senses," 36 percent "believe in," 25 percent are "not sure," and 39 percent "do not believe in." For "people on this earth are sometimes possessed by the devil," it is 49-16-35 (!). For "astrology, or that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives," it is 25-22-53. Mercifully, only 11 percent believe in channeling (22 percent are not sure), and 7 percent in the healing power of pyramids (26 percent not sure).

Creationism: Gallup (1993, 157-159), Gallup poll from June 1993. The exact question was: "Which of the following statements comes closest to your views on the origin and development of human beings: (1) human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process; (2) human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God had no part in this process; (3) God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so"? The results were 35 percent developed with God,

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11 percent developed without God, 47 percent God created in present form, 7 percent no opinion. A poll from July 1982 (Gallup 1982, 208-214) found almost identical figures, but gave breakdowns by sex, race, education, region, age, income, religion, and community size. Differences by sex, race, region, income, and (surprisingly) religion were rather small. By far the largest difference was by education: only 24 percent of college graduates supported creationism, compared to 49 percent of high-school graduates and 52 percent of those with a grade-school education. So maybe the worst science teaching is at the elementary and secondary levels.

[18] See Note 11 above.

[19] Chomsky (1984, 200), lecture delivered in 1969.

[20] Ryan (1992).

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Maurice Isserman

MICHAEL HARRINGTON AND THE DEBS-THOMAS TRADITION

The death of Michael Harrington in 1989 marked a melancholy turning point in the history of twentieth-century American socialism. Not since Eugene Debs made his initial run as the Socialist candidate for president of the United States in 1900 had the movement lacked an emblematic leading figure, someone who both voiced and seemed to embody the values of brotherhood and social justice that prefigured the coming of the cooperative commonwealth.

A new field of historical inquiry has taken shape in recent years, one that may someday come to be called, in the fashion of these things, "the new history of American social democracy." Already distinguished by the appearance of such works as Nick Salvatore's 1982 biography of Debs, Steve Fraser's 1991 biography of Sidney Hillman, and Nelson Lichtenstein's 1995 biography of Walter Reuther, this new history helps redress an imbalance in the existing historiography of the American left. The party of Debs and Norman Thomas has simply not attracted the same kind of attention lavished on the party of Earl Browder and William Z. Foster. For every study published on the history of American socialism in the past half-century, there have probably been a dozen books devoted to American communism. And although I and others have argued that the history of the latter is not simply a tale of disloyal adherence to a foreign state and a totalitarian ideology, nonetheless, given American communism's fatal entanglement with the Soviet Union, it is not difficult to understand the causes for the movement's ultimate demise. The reasons for the failure of democratic socialism to establish itself as a serious force in American political life in the twentieth century are not nearly as self-evident.

In a memoir entitled *The Long Distance Runner*, published a year before his death, Michael Harrington would refer to himself in passing as a "lesser Norman Thomas." In terms of his contribution to American social policy, that is clearly too modest a judgment. Nothing Thomas ever wrote had an impact comparable to that of Harrington's *The Other America* on the War on Poverty. But measured by the relative significance of American socialism as a movement in Thomas' and Harrington's lifetimes (not to mention in Debs's), Harrington's modesty was appropriate. His political career, spanning nearly forty years, is a case study of protracted historical irony. Harrington's dream of reviving a socialist movement with the vitality of those led by his predecessors ran aground in the 1950s on the reefs of economic prosperity and working-class loyalty to the Democratic party, and then, several decades later, ran aground again on the equally treacherous shoals of economic hard times and working-class dissaffection with the Democratic party. In the pages that follow, I offer some tentative conclusions about what it meant—for Harrington and for the American left—for him to have played the role of a "lesser Norman Thomas."

In a famous speech in 1910, Eugene Debs disavowed the role of revolutionary tribune of the people. Many years later, Harrington cited a passage from the speech as his "favorite quotation on what it means to be a true democrat..." "I am not a Labor Leader," Debs declared on that occasion:

> I do not want you to follow me or anyone else; if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this

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capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, some one else would lead you out.

Debs nonetheless remained a larger-than-life symbol of republican manhood and redemptive martyrdom to his many admirers. "Dear Comrade," Helen Keller wrote him in 1919, after his wartime conviction under the Espionage Act:

> Once more you are going to prison for upholding the liberties of the people . . . . I have long loved you because you are an apostle of brotherhood and freedom. For years I have thought of you as a dauntless explorer going toward the dawn, and, like a humble adventurer, I have followed in the trail of your footsteps . . . .

Whether he liked it or not, Debs exercised what his contemporary Max Weber called "charismatic authority." That is not to say that the pre-World War I Socialist party (SP), with its strong local organizations, regional traditions, international ties, and internal debates and rivalries, was ever simply a personal vehicle for Debs's political vision or ambitions. But it was Debs's picture, not that of Morris Hillquit or Victor Berger, that found a place of honor in the homes of garment workers on the Lower East Side, coal miners in West Virginia, and tenant farmers in Oklahoma; as Nick Salvatore notes, "he crystallized for many the meaning of Socialism . . . ."

When Debs died in 1926, he left no heir apparent within the movement. But a former Presbyterian minister named Norman Thomas would soon be invested with the "mantle of Debs" by his comrades. Although Thomas lacked Debs's credentials as a labor organizer, he was an orator of equal power, and brought his own distinctive aura of grace to the role. Harrington, who came to know Thomas well, described him as someone whose "very bearing seems to incarnate a peculiarly American and Protestant sense of social justice and personal integrity." Like Debs, Thomas could appeal to a broad working-class constituency, ranging from black and white southern sharecroppers to Jewish tailors; and even more than Debs, he found sympathetic listeners within the Protestant middle class. Although in the 1930s Franklin Roosevelt would steal some of his proposals and most of his voters, for a moment Thomas, like Debs before him, seemed the incarnation of the nation's egalitarian conscience. In the 1960s, elderly and ailing but still active politically, Thomas would anoint Harrington as his successor.

Little in Michael Harrington's early life suggested he was destined to inherit the mantle of Debs and Thomas. That he was destined for something out of the ordinary was, however, evident early on. Born in St. Louis in 1928, raised in an atmosphere of pious Catholicism and pragmatic Democratic ward politics, educated at Holy Cross, Yale Law School, and the University of Chicago, Harrington had developed a kind of triumphal aura by the time he moved to New York City at the age of twenty-one. "We thought of him as a golden boy," James Finn, a University of Chicago classmate and later a friend of Harrington's in New York, recalled in a recent interview: "[H]e was blond and very young and he had this uninterrupted success academically. He communicated this feeling that he was going to be very successful in whatever he did."

In early adulthood Harrington began a strenuous pursuit of the cultural and political margins of American life. His involvement with radical politics—first under the tutelage of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, then in a succession of obscure socialist youth groups—began shortly after he arrived in Greenwich Village. Affable and eloquent, he swiftly gained prominence within anti-Stalinist political circles—and within the drinking crowd that gathered nightly at the White Horse Tavern, a West Village hangout for accomplished writers, aspiring folksingers, would-be revolutionaries, and assorted other bohemians. There he recruited disciples and tried out ideas. "A transcript of a barroom chat with Michael Harrington," an admiring journalist once noted, "would read like the first draft of a slightly discursive *New Republic* essay." His ideas took on force from his persona. When Dave McReynolds, a young Los Angeles socialist, visited New York in 1953, he encountered Harrington holding forth in the back room of the White Horse. Although McReynolds and Harrington were on the opposite side of a factional battle at the time, Harrington's charm

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Michael Harrington, Holy Cross Purple, *March 1947. Courtesy of the Archives of the College of the Holy Cross.*

proved hard to resist. "Spent the evening listening to Mike Harrington tell of his experiences in the Catholic Worker," McReynolds wrote to a friend back in California, "and realize how terribly superficial my whole life is." Judith Malina, co-founder of the Living Theater, encountered Harrington in 1954 in the White Horse. Though smitten by Harrington (romantically as well as politically), she described him in a journal entry with a certain shrewd detachment:

> At the White Horse, Mike Harrington and his friends talk; most of it is chatter, but it's never the solemn defeatism of the [San] Remo [a rival drinking establishment on Bleecker Street] . . . . Mike is heroic . . . . That is, he takes in the environment and its people and includes them in a generalization of which he is the center. Thus the hero is in control without needing to be in command. Mike is handsome and doesn't rave in extravagant adjectives about what he likes, but smiles acceptingly, and his approbation is highly valued.

A photograph of Michael Harrington taken when he was a sixteen-year-old undergraduate shows him sitting before a typewriter at a desk crowded with books, staring into the distance with Promethean solemnity, a carefully composed tableau of the artist as a young man. From early on, Harrington had a gift for the artful pose. Throughout his adolescence and early adulthood he had studied various roles and tried them on. For many years his interests were more literary than political; asked once by a high school classmate why he didn't brush his hair more often, he replied simply, "Poets don't." He first learned about his vocation as professional revolutionary, not from any reading of the works of Marx or Lenin (that would come later), but from the novels of John Dos Passos, André Malraux, Manes Sperber, and Victor Serge. In the movement, Harrington apprenticed himself to a series of knowledgeable mentors, including Thomas, Bayard Rustin, and Max Shachtman, acquiring a repertoire of gestures and rhetorical devices that served him well in a lifetime of public speaking (from Shachtman, his most influential teacher, he even picked up a hint of Yiddish inflection). Harrington's embrace of socialism in the early 1950s might thus be seen as an act of artistic self-creation as well as ideological conversion.

Harrington departed the Catholic Worker for

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the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), the youth group of Norman Thomas's Socialist party, known on the left as the "yipsels." From there he moved on to the Young Socialist League (YSL), an affiliate of Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League (ISL). From the 1930s through the 1960s, Shachtman's greatest political asset was his ability to attract talented young disciples. The best and the brightest of them, from Irving Howe to Irving Kristol, sooner or later rejected the substance of Shachtman's teachings, but few regretted the rigorous political training with which he had endowed them.

In the 1950s, the Shachtmanites were admired on the non-communist left for the uncompromising character of their anti-Stalinism and their anti-McCarthyism; at the same time, they managed to irritate practically everyone who agreed to work with them in common cause by the shameless self-aggrandizement of their organizational maneuvering. Still, for all their sectarian posturing, they could lay claim to a plausible rationale for political optimism. When Harrington became a socialist in 1952, it was, to be sure, the eve of Eisenhower's presidency and the height of McCarthyism. But it was also a moment when the trade union movement represented a larger percentage of the American working class than ever before (or, as it turned out, since). It had been only a half-dozen years since the enormous postwar strike wave of 1946, and only four years since Walter Reuther, former socialist and current leader of the million-plus members of the United Auto Workers (UAW), had threatened to abandon the Democratic party for independent labor politics. Shachtman told a gathering of youthful followers in 1954 that

> young people who have seen only the conservative and corrupted working class as it has been for recent years . . . do not know what the working class is like . . . [I]n but a few more years it must surely show itself as it can be—the leader in the struggle for its own freedom and that of all society.

Through the mid-1950s, Harrington and his comrades clung to a fundamentalist Marxist belief in the inevitability of capitalist economic crisis. When the next big depression came along, they believed, it would bring with it a resurgence of left-leaning rank-and-file caucuses in the big industrial unions, as well as independent labor parties in states such as Michigan and New York. Just as their elders had been swept up in the industrial organizing campaigns of the 1930s and the wildcat strikes of the Second World War, so the new generation of Shachtmanites looked forward to the moment when their talents as organizers and agitators would be tapped by a revived, militant labor movement.

These expectations were, of course, disappointed. Western capitalism had entered what Eric Hobsbawm has recently referred to as its "golden decades." The "conscious working-class cohesiveness" of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath was undermined throughout the industrial west by the "combination of secular boom, full employment and a society of genuine mass consumption." There would be no depression in the 1950s to serve as catalyst to industrial strife and left-wing insurgency.

By decade's end the Shachtmanites had abandoned much of their Marxist millennialism. But they retained from their former perspective two key elements: first, the belief that contemporary politics could best be understood in terms of class interest and conflict, and second, a strong sense of organizational destiny. Although their ultimate political goal was in the process of shifting from revolutionary socialism to social democracy, their operational model remained in many respects classically Leninist. A dedicated vanguard of socialist cadre needed to give history a nudge in the right direction. And that direction, Shachtman now argued, consisted of the "realignment" of the Democratic party leftward, forcing out the "Dixiecrats" and other conservative elements and strengthening the influence of organized labor and other liberal constituencies. The result, the Shachtmanites hoped, would be the American equivalent of the British Labour party.

Harrington was an enthusiastic proponent of Shachtman's realignment strategy. But he brought to it a significant dimension of his own. In May 1960, in an article in the Catholic weekly *Commonweal*, Harrington argued that economic prosperity was no guarantee of political complacency, whatever the theorists who proclaimed the end of ideology might choose to believe. The

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triumph of "mass culture" was neither complete nor secure in the United States. Drawing on his experiences criss-crossing the country as an itinerant socialist agitator in the late 1950s, Harrington concluded that an "other America" (this was the first time he used that phrase in print), that is, an alternative America—a nation of generous democratic values and artistic and social creativity, a nation not "dominated by gadgets and mass media"—lay just beneath the surface of mainstream culture.

Although he would later be a critic of the more extravagant claims made on behalf of the revolutionary potential of the "youth culture" of the 1960s, Harrington's own radicalism at the turn of the decade contained within it a distinct countercultural strain. Not that he expected (or wanted) the masses to "drop out" and move to Greenwich Village. But he saw no contradiction between the personal impulses that had led him to the bohemian quarters of lower Manhattan and the larger social transformation to which he was committed. If the "other Americas" —the *alternative* America of intellectuals and students and artists and his Greenwich Village neighbors, and the *excluded* America of the poverty-stricken and the dispossessed—could unite in coalition with a democratic labor movement, they would represent a powerful force for social justice.

As in traditional Marxism, there was a teleological element to Harrington's socialism, but it was no longer (if it had ever really been) based on his acceptance of some iron law about the falling rate of profit or the like. It was instead closely related to the outsider's stance that Harrington had chosen for his own cultural orientation. His youthful bohemianism was not shaped primarily by a desire to shock or deride his elders or mainstream culture. Rather, he assumed that what most people wanted, and lacked even in "the affluent society" of the 1950s and early 1960s, was some version of what he had already achieved in his personal life—that is, the power of self-definition. Socialism would come—not in Harrington's lifetime perhaps, but some day and inevitably—as people awakened to the claims of "moral solidarity" and the joyous potential of "community and meaningful work."

Harrington and the Shachtmanites rejoined the Socialist party at the end of the 1950s. Notwithstanding their meager ranks and empty coffers, the Socialists seemed unusually well positioned to take advantage of the expanding political opportunities of the new decade. They had friends in high places in the civil rights movement, including Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph. They were active in the movement against nuclear testing. They had footholds of influence within the labor movement, or at least within union staff, from the old needle trades to the New York teacher's union to the UAW. Perhaps most important, they had outposts established on the nation's campuses, from Howard University to the University of Chicago to Berkeley. In 1962, a revived YPSL had as many or more members than the nascent Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Yipsels played a major role within the Student Peace Union (SPU) and were on cordial terms with leading activists in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). And, of course, the Socialists had Michael Harrington.

At the start of the 1960s, SDS co-founder Tom Hayden named Harrington as one of three Americans over the age of thirty trusted by the new generation of campus activists (Norman Thomas was another). When Harrington spoke to an audience of several thousand students at a New York City rally co-sponsored by SDS in March 1962, the *Village Voice* reported that he received a "huge stomping ovation" for his criticisms of American foreign policy. Harrington's role at SDS's Port Huron conference later that spring, where he took Tom Hayden and others to task for what he regarded as insufficient anticommunism, is well known and has overshadowed his involvement with the early New Left.

But the significance of Port Huron should not be exaggerated. When the dust had settled, Harrington remained in demand as a speaker by SDS chapters, and kept up friendly contacts with a number of Port Huron alumni. With the escalation of the war in Vietnam in 1965 and afterward, the issues of communism and anticommunism that had been debated at Port Huron took on new force. But it is a mistake to read

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back into the very early 1960s the categorical rejection of Harrington's views that characterized the later New Left. Had he not left the country early in 1963 for a year in Paris, Harrington would have had more opportunity to smooth over the ill feelings from Port Huron. In any case, thoughout the 1960s, if there was one book that a not-particularly-bookish generation of young radicals had in common, it was Harrington's *The Other America*.

When Harrington's book was published in 1962, the *Village Voice,* with a certain proprietary pride, hailed him in a front page article as a "vital voice of conscience for our times." *The Other America* received respectful attention from mainstream critics as well, although it enjoyed only modest sales in the months after its publication. Harrington was not particularly disappointed by this reception; he told *New York Post* columnist James Wechsler before the book came out that he would be happy if it sold 2,500 copies. Then in early 1963, shortly after Harrington's departure for Paris, Dwight Macdonald's fifty-page review of *The Other America* appeared in the *New Yorker*. The review attracted President John F. Kennedy's attention and inspired the first steps toward what, under President Lyndon Johnson, became the War on Poverty. When Harrington returned to the United States in December 1963 the paperback edition was on its way to breaking the hundred-thousand-copy mark in sales, and he found himself a literary and political celebrity. Early in 1964 he got a call from Sargent Shriver to come to Washington to help plan the new administration's anti-poverty programs.

Nineteen sixty-four proved a year of continuing triumphs for Harrington. When he became chairman of the board of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) in the fall of 1964, James Wechsler lauded him in the *New York Post* as "a quiet thunderer" and "a man for all seasons," predicting he would emerge as the unifier of the "scattered legions among the liberal intellectual community, the civil rights activists and the more enlightened sectors of organized labor."

If anyone could have pulled off that role—and had there not been a war in Vietnam to complicate the task—it would have been Harrington. It is true that he lacked both Debs's proletarian credentials and Thomas's roots in the evangelical reform tradition. But he went on to carve out his own niche in the history of American social democracy, as a spokesman for what in 1968 he would dub the "conscience constituency." This constituency was based in a "new class" of "scientists, technicians, teachers and professionals in the public sector of the society," predisposed "by education and work experience" to appreciate the virtues of social planning, and potentially a powerful "ally of the poor and the organized workers . . . ." Coming out of urban and suburban reform politics, supporters of civil rights, civil liberties, and anti-war causes, the conscience constituency was the core of the "new politics" movement that would have a dramatic impact on the political culture and fortunes of the Democratic party in the years to come.

Harrington continued to insist that the organized working class had to be a key component of any effective movement for social change. In the early 1970s he sometimes spoke of creating a coalition of followers of the "three Georges": McGovern, Meany, and Wallace (in the latter case, of course, it was the populist rather than the racist aspects of Wallace's appeal he hoped the left could learn to tap). Harrington often spoke before trade union audiences, and with good effect. But his speeches and writings had a particular appeal to college-educated, middle-class liberals. He presented his ideas in a form at once rational and pragmatic, but also visionary and uplifting. He was able, unlike any other figure on the American left in recent memory, to combine an intellectual analysis with a set of practical proposals.

Here he differed from Debs and Thomas. Both of his predecessors had combined the roles of down-to-earth organizer and inspired moral tribune. What Harrington added to the mix was the role of policy specialist. In speech after speech and book after book, he displayed his command of the ever-expanding literature of social welfare policy debates without ever succumbing to the dry, academic style of what has come to be known as the "policy wonk." His message was that practical reforms—the laws and policies that made life easier for ordinary people in the short run—need not be linked to acceptance of the existing political and economic

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arrangements of capitalist society. Rather, in the long run, such reforms could serve as steps toward the democratic transformation of that society.

At the start of the 1960s Harrington still retained traces of his midwestern accent. When he talked of creating a "democratic social order," it came out sounding, to the delight of listeners, like democratic social *ardor*. Harrington's "ardor" proved infectious. A local newspaper recorded the response when he spoke on the campus of Savannah State College in 1966:

> A tall man with blue eyes in a ruddy face, Michael Harrington has not lost the eagerness of his youthful college days . . . His words tumble out. Emphasis follows emphasis. He is so imbued with his topic one feels he can hardly wait to give one knowledge. An audience of students, faculty, social workers, and others rose in tribute at the end of the lecture...

If "knowledge" was part of what Harrington had to offer, it was knowledge made all the more attractive for being accompanied by a sense of intimacy, fellowship, and shared purpose—as if each and every listener, however previously naive, apathetic, or politically inexperienced they may have been, were now being individually welcomed as a regular in Harrington's circle around the table in the backroom of the White Horse.

The effects of a Harrington speech, however persuasive, were apt to wear off quickly in the absence of a sizeable and credible movement that could channel the zeal of new recruits in politically rewarding directions.

And the 1970s did not prove a propitious time for creating a coalition of "the three Georges." As many Democratic party hopefuls would soon find to their dismay, and Republicans to their advantage, the waning of the "golden decades" of Western capitalism increasingly pitted the followers of George Meany and George Wallace against those of George McGovern. Workers found their wages eroded by inflation and their economic security undermined by global markets, deindustrialization, and corporate downsizing. Keynesian fiscal policies lost their power to stimulate continued economic expansion, and liberal social welfare policies could no longer be funded out of an ever-expanding economic pie. Many working- and middle-class Americans concluded in the course of the 1970s that the gains registered by the "Other America" must have come at their personal expense, spurring tax revolts and antiwelfare sentiment. Except among the wealthy, economic self-interest ceased to be a good indicator of voting behavior in American politics. Instead, a host of social and cultural issues, from gun control to abortion, came to dominate political debate.

Some of Harrington's erstwhile comrades in the Socialist party concluded that as good socialists—which to them meant socialists capable of working effectively within the confines of the actually existing labor movement—they could no longer either afford to be, or to be seen in the company of, good pacifists, good feminists, good friends of the poor, or anything else at odds with the prevailing political and cultural winds. In the midst of what turned out to be a forced march toward neoconservatism, right-wing Shachtmanites sneered at what they regarded as Harrington's dilettantish flirtation with the culturally suspect politics of the new class. The personal and the political collided with a vengeance in the SP's internal factionalism, and Harrington's outsider stance came to be treated as a form of class treachery.

"Mike is part of the Jimmy's crowd," Tom Kahn (a long-time Shachtmanite and newly hired George Meany speechwriter) told a reporter from the *Wall Street Journal* in 1972. Jimmy's, a bar on Sheridan Square, had replaced the White Horse as Harrington's favorite watering hole in Greenwich Village; Kahn dismissed it as the kind of place "where the *Village Voice* crowd, the [Bella] Abzugites, [and] the New Classniks hang out." As the SP headed toward a showdown in 1972, one veteran of the 1930s wrote to a party publication warning of the consequences of factional attacks on Harrington:

> Whatever reservations some comrades may have concerning some of Com. Harrington's actions and views, his importance to the SP is incommensurable. . . . He is "Mr. Socialism U.S.A." in the seventies, just as Eugene V. Debs was in 1917 . . . and Norman Thomas from 1932-1965. That doesn't mean that any of those comrades was flawless, nor immune to criticism. Loyal and informed socialists differed with all of them—and frequently were right! But they were all absolutely essential to the party's

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image and growth. To discard Com. Harrington—or to place him in such a position that he could not function properly—would be an act of unforgiveable folly.

Not for the first time in the history of the American left, folly prevailed. With the Socialist party offering backhanded support to Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential race, Harrington resigned his chairmanship in protest. And in 1973, he split with his former Shachtmanite comrades to form a new group, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC).

DSOC enjoyed some genuine if still modest successes in the next decade, growing to a membership triple that of the SP in the 1960s, attracting a number of prominent trade unionists into its ranks, and playing a significant role in mobilizing anti-Jimmy Carter sentiment at the Democratic party's 1978 mid-term convention. Harrington, who had campaigned for Bobby Kennedy in the California primary in 1968, was an early and valued supporter of Ted Kennedy's presidential primary challenge to Carter's renomination in 1980. Had Kennedy succeeded in his challenge, and replaced Carter in the White House in January 1981, Harrington's long-cherished ambition of creating a "left wing of the possible" might have come to fruition.

Instead, it was a Republican president who took the oath of office that January and one who was, moreover, a sworn and determined enemy of the welfare state and all its works. Harrington responded with a characteristically encouraging message to his followers, declaring that "there is hope even in this year zero of Ronald Reagan" of assembling a "coalition embracing the potential majority" in defense of the reforms secured in the New Deal and the Great Society. But this was, at best, a defensive optimism—a far cry from the ambitious social agenda he advocated in the 1960s and 1970s, when he had argued that "the real task, for the democratic Left and for the nation, is now to go beyond the New Deal. Far beyond it."

Throughout the Reagan years, Harrington continued to attract enthusiastic audiences to his public speeches, and won thousands of new listeners in his role as a National Public Radio commentator. But if there was a role for a single prominent democratic socialist *spokesman* in the 1980s, there didn't prove to be much of one for a democratic socialist *movement*. DSOC, which became the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in 1982, wore itself out in what proved a futile effort to reinvigorate (and, increasingly, to substitute for) the demoralized liberal and labor defenders of traditional Democratic reformism. By mid-decade, the only sign of life shown by many DSA locals was in turning out a crowd whenever Michael Harrington came to town to speak. To the extent that there was a visible and explicitly radical political challenge offered from the left, it tended to take the form of one or another particularist variation of "identity politics," at odds with Harrington's inclusionary vision of coalition-building.

While Harrington retained a "professionally optimistic tone" in public, in private conversation with long-time political confidantes like *Dissent* editor Irving Howe, he could be decidedly more skeptical. According to Howe, Harrington in his last years came to see socialism as "increasingly problematic," less a practical goal than a kind of Kantian regulative ideal, a moral law commanding behavior.

At least once in the 1980s Harrington gave public voice to such doubts, in a talk he gave at Princeton University in November 1984 on the occasion of the centennial of Norman Thomas's birth. It was a bleak November for Harrington, both politically and personally. A few days before the Princeton event, Ronald Reagan had won a decisive re-election victory, smashing any remaining illusions on the left that his 1980 triumph over Carter had been an aberration. And on his drive to Princeton from his home in New York, Harrington discovered a lump on his neck that shortly after would be diagnosed as cancerous.

Before an audience of faculty, students, and veterans of the socialist movement, Harrington offered a sober assessment of the changes that had taken place in American politics since the days of the Socialist party's greatest influence:

> The radical republican notion of "citizenship" which both Debs and Thomas incarnated, is disappearing. . . . The grandchildren of men and women who once stayed late into the night at the Grange

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hall or the union hall, talking intensely with each other about what kind of society they wanted to build, now stay home watching TV. If they participate at all in shaping their collective future, it is most likely by opening a computer-generated envelope from some committee in New York or Washington . . . .

While Harrington said nothing about his own role in the socialist movement, it was hard to avoid the implication that he would be the end of the line. And indeed, seven years after his death, not only is there no obvious inheritor to the Debs-Thomas-Harrington mantle, but there seem to be no active contenders for the title. There are people of equivalent eloquence and personal charisma on the left today, but they are either more deeply embedded in their academic careers than Harrington ever chose to be, or, if involved in active political life, more narrowly focused on personal electoral ambitions. Or perhaps they just have less of an artistic temperment. Harrington was at bottom a romantic and a dreamer, for all of his emphasis on the practical and the possible. How else could this product of the St. Louis middle class and a good Jesuit education have successfully re-invented himself as the heir to Debs and Thomas?

The organizational fortunes of American socialism swung upward and downward, repeatedly and dramatically, in the years from 1900 through 1989. Virtually the only constant in the movement's history has been its tradition of charismatic leadership. First Debs, then Thomas, then Harrington have been honored as a social conscience by millions of Americans. If we are indeed at the end of that dynasty, it cannot bode well for the prospects of the American left. Leaders are as important for what they symbolize as for what they accomplish. Skip Roberts, a Vietnam veteran, union organizer, and Democratic party activist who joined DSOC in 1973, had always been proud to identify himself in public as a "Michael Harrington socialist." As he recalled in a recent interview:

> I could take Harrington out and sell him. Nothing to be ashamed of, or try to hide. You can point out, that's right, I'm a socialist because of Michael Harrington. [In his speeches and writings] he helped you see how you put things together. I think that empowered people. Not only enriched them, but gave them some framework of "what I think is right and what my values are."

Harrington spent many years thinking about and preparing himself to carry on the Debs/Thomas tradition. Like his predecessors, he believed that to awaken the conscience or change the consciousness of a nation, one had to build an organization, start a publication, speak on a thousand street corners to crowds of hundreds (or tens, if necessary), recruiting one's followers from those converted by the sound of one's voice and the strength of one's arguments. An honorable, even heroic vision, it was also, as Harrington reluctantly conceded in the last years of his life, one for which there remained precious little room in American political culture. □

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A quarterly publication of the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas

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SOCIALIST REGISTER 1996

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Monthly Review Press 122 West 27th St. NYC 10001

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Christopher Hitchens

AGAINST LESSER EVILISM

"Whenever A and B are in opposition to each other," wrote George Orwell in 1945, in "Through a Glass, Rosily," "anyone who attacks or criticizes A is accused of aiding and abetting B." He added: "It is a tempting maneuver, and I have used it myself more than once, but it is dishonest." Orwell lived and wrote in a period when the pressure on intellectuals to "take sides" was ostensibly much more palpable than it is now, and when with that pressure came a surreptitious invitation to moral blackmail: the element that tells thinking people that the less adventurous the use they make of their ratiocinative capacity, the better. When the big decision has already been taken, what need of paltry misgivings? Who desires to be called a wavering intellectual dilettante when grand enterprises are on foot, and when the engine of destiny has gone to all the trouble of revving itself up?

In our time, of course, the great question has become more banal. It is most commonly stated as the theory and practice of the "lesser evil." And, as argued in its conventional form, it has become worn as smooth as a stone. Thus A will exhort B, how can you vote for Clinton when . . . (list of betrayals and depredations follows) and B replies, without the slightest rehearsal, do you suppose that the right wing (taxonomy of depredations and fell intentions ready to hand) would be preferable? And that's the whole exchange. And not just in a nutshell either, since the amount of time and of mental effort expended is usually less than it has taken me to set it down. However, as Prince Hamlet once exclaimed, one may be confined in a nutshell and still count oneself a king of infinite space. Folded inside the "lesser evil" argument, there is a worthwhile confrontation waiting to be enacted. The smooth stone can become an effective projectile, to be employed with care by either antagonist.

If one divides the contending parties into the purists and rejectionists on the one hand, and the pragmatists and lesser-evilists on the other, one can discover at once that neither really means what they say. Out of respect for Orwell, and for the sake of sheer convenience, let us call these respective debaters A and B for now. A does not really maintain that it makes *no* difference which party wins the election. It must be agreed for one thing that no outcome is identical to any other. Nor does A usually like to argue that it would be better for "the other side" to win, because it is that "other side" that anchors the concept of "lesser evil" to begin with. (There used to be a subset of A, which said with contempt that the worse things were, the better. *Tanto pio, tanto meglia,* as the Italian Red Brigades once happily intoned. But this faction no longer exists for our purposes.) Thus, B starts with the advantage of being able to address A in pitying tones, as if A had a lesson still to learn from that great moral tutor, "the real world." Yet B would never be caught arguing in favor of permanent one-party rule, in the real world or any other. One-party rule does not work in practice or in principle. Why, then, does B argue that it is *always* better for the Democratic party to win an election, whether congressional or presidential, and that it always has been better? If the "lesser evil" argument is not an axiom, it is nothing. It cannot be true only some of the time, without losing all or most of

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its force. Furthermore, surely B would generally scorn anyone whose vote was, so to speak, mortgaged in advance. How can you be an autonomous and free citizen if your franchise is pledged to one machine, without conditions, whatever happens in the course of the election or in the conduct of the argument?

Let us try some "real world" applications. I'll select mine only from what was going on in the newspapers while I was writing this essay. Elections and campaigns were underway in Israel, Italy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia, and the United States. An example, first, from each of the four overseas ones:

• In the closing days of the Israeli election campaign, where nobody but a fool would claim that there was "no difference" between the two main coalitions, Shimon Peres undertook a campaign of ruthless bombing and strafing in southern Lebanon. Some hundreds of thousands of refugees were created as a matter of policy, and some hundreds of innocent civilians were, in "collateral" manner, deprived of life and limb. It was, I thought, slightly too easily said by American and Israeli pundits that this could be overlooked as a hard-headed electoral test of Peres's "toughness" (surely sufficiently demonstrated already) on the "security" issue. Amos Perlmutter, a rather hawkish Israeli pundit, observed to me that if the problem was the bases of Hezbollah then Peres could have sent a commando expedition to deal with them, so to speak, selectively. This point, though it left untouched the larger issue of Israel's right to be in occupation of southern Lebanon in the first place, was at least congruent with Perlmutter's second point, which was that the actual collective punishment had increased support for Hezbollah and stored up future trouble, while exposing Israeli soldiers to the temptation to commit crimes against the defenseless. I think we may take it that this same advice was available to Peres. So, what is wrong with the following factual assertion: "Shimon Peres, leader of a party that is a member of the Socialist International, ostentatiously killed and scattered the civilians of another country in order to protect himself from domestic criticism and to guard a personal and electoral flank?" If A had said this, then B might have replied (as the Clinton-Gore administration indeed did) that one had to bear in mind the "peace process" and the dangers of a Netanyahu victory. Yet there *was* a Netanyahu victory, and who can say that, by echoing Netanyahu on the fetish of "security" in this way, Peres did not (subjectively and yes, "objectively") assist in bringing this about?

Let's keep score. The As would have made a correct moral point and been able to claim that in doing so they had not undermined their "own" side. The Bs would have sat on their hands morally, or perhaps applauded something very questionable indeed, and seen their own side defeated not with honor but instead with ignominy. Clintonoid score: uncritically pro-B, but retaining the power (and the readiness) to shift to Netanyahu in any case.

• In Italy, a ramshackle coalition of Stalinist, Eurocommunist, liberal, and centrist forces narrowly outpointed an opportunist alliance of neofascist, fascist, clerical, separatist, and conservative parties. What's not to like about that? True, the left put forward a mediocre candidate of conciliation to "reassure" waverers. True, also, the left will now have to impose an "austerity" budget. True, perhaps, that the next time around the right will be led by the neofascist Gianfranco Fini, who will run against the austerity program and possibly win. Not much alternative here: the balance of forces is too equal. Factual statement: "The As accepted the logic of the Bs, who accepted most of the logic of their right-wing opponents, who were glad to be out of power in a crisis period." Clintonoid score: neutral. Had already said that they did not object to the presence of neofascists in government (a postwar European first).

• In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Dayton accords created conditions where those parties would do best that represented a one-nation, one-religion, one-leader ideology—very much in accordance with the partitionist spirit of the accords themselves. Only one leader of one party in one post-Yugoslav republic stood both for democracy as the end as well as the means, and for multi-ethnic pluralism as the system as well as the goal. This was Haris Siladzic, at different times prime minister and foreign minister, and now leader of the Party of Bosnia-Herze-

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govina. He had separated himself from the ruling SDA (Party of Democratic Action) under whose colors the war of liberation had largely been fought. In June 1996, campaigning near Bihac, he was attacked by an Islamist mob, loyal to the ruling party, and beaten to the ground with an iron bar. Most reports from the region ignored this "incident," since the electoral "process" was seen as a referendum or plebiscite on a pre-arranged decision to divide Bosnia into three one-party and one-religion cantons. A vote for Siladzic, in this discourse, was a wasted vote and a romantic gesture, an inconvenience to the pragmatists and realists who said, indignantly, that war was the "only alternative" to their peace plan—which had itself, be it noted, grown out of a war they had licensed.

Difficult to score this one as between A and B, since As and Bs had taken different and similar positions on the war and on partition. But a definite defeat for those who opposed both ethnic partition and the use of force to achieve it. Clintonoid score: indifferent to the war at the first; favorable to partition throughout; most inclined to think of all ruling-party signatories to Dayton (Milosevic, Tudjman, and Izetbegovic) as the only "players" worth bothering about. Very hard, however, to classify Izetbegovic versus Siladzic as in any intelligible sense as the "lesser evil." It could only be true if those with the power to decide such things decided to make it so.

• In the instance of Russia, what is wrong with the following factual assertion: "With Boris Yeltsin, the United States worked tirelessly to assure the political triumph of a drunken, moribund, authoritarian war criminal"? Nothing, as a matter of fact, except when we do our patriotic duty and "consider the alternatives." When compounded of the elements of renascent Stalinism and chauvinism, this argument from alternatives has the hoped-for effect of a Medusa's head. It turns all criticism into stone. And in such a petrified landscape, who has time or permission to notice the other "alternatives"? Sergei Kovalev, for example, who inherited the mantle of Andrei Sakharov and who resigned as Yeltsin's human rights *responsable* over the butchery in Chechnya. Or a host of other citizens and rights groups who, once their ruling enemy was defined as indispensable vis à vis their more traditional enemy, found all the oxygen sucked out of their atmosphere. ("You don't like our Boris? Surely you're not saying you really want a return to the past.")

Once Yeltsin had become "our" man, moreover, there is no guarantee that he would not have been defended just as dogmatically against a *more* democratic opponent. It's been known to happen in American foreign policy. Yeltsin was, for example, given great latitude to protect and defend Slobodan Milosevic lest any affront to the Serbs increase his own difficulties with Orthodox and irredentist types. And even Milosevic has benefited in his time from being a "lesser evil," indeed continues to do so. So let us at least, as we pay our regular rental to pragmatism, be honest. Let us admit that we know what the price is going to be. Once secure in his position as a "lesser" evil, Yeltsin is free to be more and more "great" an evil, if not indeed greater. This ratchet-like rule will apply in other comparable situations.

The As were right in many ways this time, in predicting early that Yeltsin would turn out to be a bully and a demagogue and a chauvinist. The Bs could hardly be expected to give up their point that there were worse demagogues and chauvinists around. Clintonoid score: they endorsed Yeltsin whether he was a bully and demagogue and chauvinist or not, and thus have a large share in his crimes as well as his comparative and marginal advantages.

Now let us see how this macro-argument plays out in the case of Clinton and the left. And here is a micro-example. David Mixner is well-known in both gay and liberal Democratic circles as a highly effective activist and organizer. He was a major fund-raiser for the Clinton administration. During the last election, he "delivered" large sums of money and large quantities of votes to the Clinton ticket, making this the first presidential election in which the organized "gay vote" played a distinctive role. The campaign pledge to lift the ban on homosexuals serving in the military was the high-profile *quid* for this *quo*, and enjoyed wide public sympathy. No need to rehearse what happened to

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that. Mixner nonetheless continued his loyal efforts on behalf of the administration. His reward, last June, was a presidential announcement that, as soon as the "Defense of Marriage Act" could be rammed through both houses, Clinton was impatient to sign it. Faced with such an undignified willingness to capitulate to the Christian Right before battle had even been joined, Mixner spoke bitterly of "an ugly, vicious act" and "one of the most immoral things I've ever seen him [Clinton] do." But, as he made haste to tell Michael Kelly of the *New Yorker*, he was still intending to vote for Clinton this fall. "Politically, he did the right thing. They made a correct calculation that they could do this to us and get away with it."

Here, stated in its full masochistic form, is the very essence of "lesser evilism." If it were a doctrine, instead of a reflex or a dogma, it would be a doctrine without limits. Try rephrasing it. "We have already made the decision that they can do this to us and get away with it. We have made this decision known in advance. *Ergo* they can and will get away with it."

In four short years, Clinton has made himself both the patron and the serf of corporate America, and not just "presided" over the national polarization of power and wealth and income, but actively sponsored it. He has advertised himself as the candidate of capital punishment, and his crime and terrorism bills have cut great roads through civil liberty and habeas corpus. He has awarded the military-industrial complex a heavier share of the national budget than it even had the nerve to demand. He has fired or abandoned, with contempt, any members of his government, or any nominees for government service, who come under the least attack from the right. He has made the morals of the underclass into the touchstone issue, holding the poor accountable for their conduct in a way that he would never dare to do with his rich campaign donors. He has proposed the dumping of a half-century-old commitment to provide a welfare minimum for all American children. He has dissipated a once-dynamic consensus in favor of national health care. Absurd insinuations from the GOP to the contrary, there is every reason to suppose that Clinton has fully internalized all the regnant assumptions of power in America, and that a second term would see all these tendencies become more full blown. And until August, his re-election strategy was being crafted by a paid-up Republican strategist, Dick Morris, who cut his teeth working for Jesse Helms. Evidently, the calculation had been made that Clinton "can do this to us and get away with it."

Now, if all this were being done by Bush or Dole, it might or might not be more thorough and brutal. But one thing can be stated with confidence. It would be meeting with *opposition.* I had the most remarkable conversation recently with Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. In a speech on the proposed welfare compromise—the one that pitches perhaps a million children off the support rolls—he had asked what had happened to the dozens of well-organized lobbying groups who usually watch out for the interests of the poor and neglected. They had fallen silent. They were shuffling their feet. They had demobilized. "I had *to shame* them," said the original begetter of "welfare reform." Much the same could be said about civil libertarians and the crime and terrorism bills, and about labor and African-American forces across the board. We are, albeit in a "soft" way, back in the petrified world of party-mindedness, where Democratic centralism brooks no disunity and where dissenters are accused of "giving ammunition to the enemy" or weakening the united front. I would not undertake to say for certain whether this state of affairs qualifies as "lesser," because the "lesser" is an assumption at once unprovable and unfalsifiable. But I can certainly recognize it as "evil," for all the good that does me. And I think that the examples, of Mixner and of welfare "reform," are sufficient refutation of a certain line popular among left-liberals. Let us have a "two-track" strategy, say these master tacticians. Let us vote for Clinton on Tuesday, and mobilize independently of, and if necessary against, him on Wednesday. Not only do the arguments that sustain the first have a tendency to militate against the second, but so do the habits of mind and patterns of behavior.

It might be objected that there is no reason *in principle* (and therefore, no reason in practice) why one cannot chant the above slogan and succeed in having it both ways. But it will

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be found, both in practice and in principle, that all euphemisms and all compromises and all adaptations exact their toll. For one thing, this is not a four-yearly excruciation. It goes on, as does the campaign process, all the time. Once concede that you are with party B, and that's all anyone wants to know about you. The hundred-and-one local, regional, and "mid-term" pressures will replicate themselves across the board, and allow less freedom of choice rather than more. Well—since we are after all speaking of brute practicalities—*cui bono*? Oh dear, it turns out that the beneficiary will always be the person who takes the party-line argument in deadly earnest. So, just this once, let's give the benefit of the doubt to Marion Barry or Richard Daley or Edwin Edwards. Do you suppose that they worry about the exquisiteness of your calibration? Do you imagine that in a bottom-line argument, you can out-bottom-line them? The onus here is on those who hold the contrary opinion. When, in fact, did they ever multiply the difficulties of a supposedly friendly incumbent, or potentially friendly candidate, under this flag?

To take the classic instance of opposition politics, is it not the case that many liberals and even leftists (and even *Dissent*niks) were inclined to hang back about the Vietnam war and about civil rights, for no better reason than that a possibly friendly White House might be upset? Might not the Mississippi delegation have been seated at the Democratic convention a little earlier if the Democratic party had been out of power? I don't claim to know the answer (though I think I can guess it) but I do remember how the arguments went and I hate to see them being so smoothly recycled. This brings us smack up against the ironies of history. Irony is marketed at a discount these days. The last time I can remember it being deployed at full strength was during the gubernatorial election in Louisiana in 1992. The above-mentioned Edwin Edwards, a high-octane fraud and poseur and captive of the special interests, was the Democratic standard-bearer against David Duke. Well, that should have been an easy enough call—if you could forget the role of people like Edwards in recruiting populist support for a person like Duke in the first place. Anyway, the anti-Duke activists in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, and many tougher spots, came up as they had to with the disarming slogan: "Vote For the Crook. It's Important." To this declension we have all come, by degrees that were invisible until they became explicit. Hurray for all those brought us to this pass, and will bring us to narrower ones.

Ironies of history are not just conversation points. Should it not concern us that the other side knows when to lose? Just *be* Newt Gingrich for a moment. Do you suppose that he wants Bob Dole to become president? I have heard his acolytes snickering to the contrary these past two years. His entire power of patronage and placemanship demands a Democrat in the White House. And what about Bill Clinton? Why do we imagine so automatically that he desires the return of a Democratic Congress? His whole "take-off" as a re-electable president began with the eclipse of his own party in White House and Senate. I hate to say it (all right, I don't actually *hate* to say it) but it's a bad day when *Commentary* magazine shows a superior grasp of the ironies. Reviewing the near destruction of the Democratic party in the July 1996 issue, the intelligent conservative Daniel Casse had this to say:

> In the shadow of November 1994, what few could have predicted was that the ousting of the Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress would turn out to be, for the President, a liberating experience . . . . Since January of this year, the President has appeared bent not only on imitating but on seizing on the Republican agenda . . . Far from trying to rebuild the party, Clinton is trying to decouple the presidential engine from the congressional train. He has learned how the Republicans can be, at once, a steady source of new ideas and a perfect foil.

Anyone who wishes to play the old "lesser evil" board game after considering the above had best put himself in the position of his smartest opponent. Time spent in that way is seldom wasted.

If the purely pragmatic ingredient of lesser evilism were any good, it would surely appeal to those who make a virtue precisely of their pragmatism: the conservative Democrats and right-wing Lib-Lab types. Yet these forces,

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whenever faced with a turn in the party that they do not care for, are always ready to jettison lesser evilism. "Democrats for Nixon" did so well, in fact, that it became the building block for the Democratic Leadership Council and eventually for the Clinton candidacy itself, just in nice time to sound the "lesser evil" alarm for everybody else. Those "social democrats" who fled the Labour party in the face of Thatcherism, and who ensured Thatcherism's success at two subsequent general elections, have now made their peace at a high price and been readmitted to a Labour party that brooks no criticism *at all* from the left. The Tony Blair "project" depends, after all, on a clear unity against the Tory foe. So . . . not in front of the *goyim*, if you please.

There is an enduring legend, among those foot soldiers who always stayed loyal (to generals who found them expendable), that it was the left that secured Nixon's original victory in 1968. In that year, with the country ruined by an imperialist war and with the gains of the civil rights movement callously flung away and with a state-sponsored campaign against dissent in full swing, some people actually did say that they would not vote for a man, Hubert Humphrey, who was directly complicit in all this. The revolt was more one of moral revulsion than of political principle but it did at least say out loud what is supposed never to be said—that there is a limit of decency beyond which one should not allow oneself to be pushed. The self-correcting mechanism of emotional coercion temporarily broke down, or at least faltered. And as it happened, the Democratic ticket was narrowly defeated that year. But it wasn't the fault of the few isolated rejectionists. The leadership had spent the preceding four years steadily destroying the basis for reformist politics and consciously crushing opposition within the party itself. On the eve of the vote, furthermore (as we suspected then, and has been attested since in the memoirs of Clark Clifford and H.R. Haldeman), the Johnson-Humphrey forces came into possession of information that might have made the difference. They discovered an unethical and probably illegal back channel between Nixon and the South Vietnamese junta. Pull out of the Paris peace talks at the last minute, said Nixon and Kissinger to their friends, and Saigon will get a better deal from the Republican victors. Humphrey personally decided not to go public with this devastating intelligence, according to Clifford, because it would do such damage to bipartisan civility. So power takes care of itself, and as for the birds . . . well, they can always chirrup "lesser evil" in tones of surprised relief. But if the two-party collusion is the evil itself, then the birds will have to learn a new song.

"Consider the alternatives." Not a bad mantra, when you come really to reflect upon it. We should all, always, be considering the alternatives. That's what we engage in politics to do. The argument from the lesser evil, however, has become a different sort of mantra; one designed precisely to *quench* the consideration of alternatives. There is an undistributed middle in the lesser-evil syllogism, and a rather indigestible one at that. It suggests that we are not responsible for what we *do* vote for, only for what we vote against. It is therefore morally shady. It commits us in advance to underwrite those who have an objective quite different from our own, and methods entirely different. It places a guard upon the tongue, and upon the exercise of critical intelligence. It is both ahistorical and unhistorical. It is not even useful as a tactical resort (which is just as well, since it can be so simply grasped as to make any op-ed amateur into a master strategist). Those in power in our present politics already possess, by way of excuses and self-justifications, an *embarasse de richesse*. It is not our task to devise, on their behalf, further evasions. □

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David Bromwich

THE STRANGENESS OF FREE SPEECH

To pursue a steady commitment to freedom of speech is a difficult choice. It entails a suppression of the desire to silence or somehow restrict the opinions of people with whom you disagree, a decision to allow their speech in spite of your disagreement, and in spite of the evil effects which may come from their exercise of the freedom. Self-sacrifice, it has been said, enables us to sacrifice others without blushing, and those who are for restricting speech certainly have this kind of consistency: the pleasure they ask others to give up, they mean to give up themselves. But it is hard to imagine anyone who ever felt the impulse and used the chance to speak his mind or to speak her mind could feel that this was merely a negotiable pleasure. To have known what free speech is, not lazily but vividly, for oneself, with the urgency of a practical need, is to see it as a necessity. Many kinds of people have felt this necessity, and some generalizations about them are possible.

Those who care most for the political liberty to speak as freely as they think are, often, politically on the dissident side—they are people who do not see their views routinely carried in the usual channels of opinion. They may belong to a religious persuasion that is not sanctioned or encouraged or otherwise approved by society. Or, just as commonly, though it is a case we tend to neglect, they may be people in isolation, who were so aroused by the falseness of some word or deed they witnessed that they felt at once their surest way of leveling their antagonist was with words: they had no doubt of their power to do it in words, though actions, the procedures of official litigation and grievance, might fail. These are not people who "see evil and think law." They see evil and think, and say, "Stop it." Often unused to power, and far from the secure possession of power when they use the freedom, they are nevertheless resourceful, and the resources they count on are intellectual. Experience has not taught them that good behavior always succeeds, and like Thoreau they fear that if they have anything to regret, it will be their good behavior.

What shall we say about those who want to restrict this freedom? The truth in many cases is that they have never experienced its value for themselves. Much of the cultural and educational establishment in America falls into this category: rule-followers, men and women of prudence who wear the coat of convention in all its changing shapes. These are the benign inheritors and promoters of business as usual, and they are right not to think themselves intolerant, for they will assist any tolerance that is compatible with a quiet life. Far more important among the enemies of free speech are those who control the power that speech may threaten, and in a commercial democracy like ours, that means people with a lot of money, or with close ties to business or government. But there are in American society, and have been in every democracy, numbers who remain lukewarm because they simply have not found themselves in a minority at any time on any issue affecting free speech. The garish tabloid story that advances no public cause and destroys a reputation, the innocuous gesture of loyalty that somebody *will* refuse in principle, the interminable committee meeting tortured into a last hour of debate by a pedantic scruple: we have all at moments reacted against these things. Policies are worked up from the reactions by people

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who, if they ever profited from the advice of anyone who opposed their will, were at the time unconscious of the fact, or conscious of it only as an irritant.

Finally, in a society where the disparities of education are great, those who fear the effects of speech may include people who sense among the powers arrayed against them the mysterious power of words. If they have resources, they are not intellectual. People in this state distrust the usual behavior of those in power and the bad behavior of anyone. In despair, they look to a future in which an implicit code of decency will govern all actions; restrictions on speech will be out of the question, for the very temptation to speak wrongly or offensively will have been uprooted from human nature. Milton's belief that "that virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure"—this belief, and the sentiment that prompted a nation of dissenters to convert it from a heresy to a constitutional practice, will have been reduced again to a heresy.

The freedom embodied for the United States in the First Amendment was never a settled fact of life so much as an ideal, an ideal that is better, we may think, for having been stated briefly, clearly, and in a place where its meaning is hard to miss. Its scope was never established once and for all, and its maintenance is not more threatened now than at many times in our history. But one feature of the present moment deserves to be noticed. An unlikely class of persons—professionals, whose daily sustenance comes from words and ideas—have directed the strongest suspicion against the power of words. Lawyers, social scientists, scholars of the arts and letters, and psychotherapists or psychological counselors have become the vanguard in lobbying for and actually drafting restrictive rules on speech. Why? The answer would make a very full chapter of the history of bad conscience in our time; but consider the resemblances between these statements: "I thought it was a rude way to talk but a lawyer told me it was actionable." "I thought it was an unpleasant experience but my therapist told me it was a trauma." "I thought the book was in bad taste but my English teacher told me it was a totalizing discourse that constituted an assault on my self-esteem." All these sentences share a current assumption that language—the language of reaction or rebuke; the language of regret or self-reproach; the language of criticizing or answering back—is impotent and must remain passive in the face of certain experiences of mental or emotional suffering, or a temporary but unwelcome subordination to authority. Language, on this assumption, inevitably serves as a tool of oppression, unless its uses are carefully patrolled. At the moment of outrage, the right response is not to engage in controversy but to aim a loaded accusation that is sure to carry more than verbal force.

This taking of speechless offense against offensive speech is a wholly intelligible reflex, much easier to explain and less artificial than the principle of toleration: that is the first thing to realize about it. The distrust expresses a kind of common sense that was universal before the Enlightenment. There are sacred things which nobody is permitted to speak against, on pain of being cast out of society, or reclassified among the never-to-be-understood, the mad. Most people think it is *natural* to feel this way; and they are right. Every heroic case of free speech has been viewed from the other side as a case of blasphemy; and the other side has never been wrong. There is a circular relation, bewildering to those who stand outside it, between the authority of reason, judgment, conscience—all those Enlightenment goods—and the decline of the moral prohibitions once enforced in the name of things more sacred than life. In the light of reason, the honor paid to those things is an infamy.

The modern challenge to the common sense of blasphemy came from a few liberal societies in which a kind of spiritual equality, felt by someone testifying rightly against someone who had testified wrongly, appeared to carry with it a promise of other sorts of emancipation. It is sometimes said, very mistakenly and shallowly, that the reason we ought to defend liberty of speech is that we live in something called a free market of ideas, and if we deprive ourselves of even one possible hint toward a better idea than

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we yet possess, we shall suffer accordingly as bad shoppers, or shopkeepers, of ideas. This is a specious reason, plausible enough to carry momentary conviction with persons who know that they value the free market, and who wonder how far they should care for other freedoms. But nobody has ever in a hard moment wanted to defend free speech for this reason. We do not allow others to speak against our inclinations because we have made a cost-benefit analysis of the matter, nor do we let them speak simply because—though this is a better reason—we have imagination and we believe in the power of example and we see there will be occasions when we shall need them to do the same for us. A large part of the motive for toleration in speech, as in other walks of life, is self-respect. I refuse to put a stop to the words of someone whose speech does not actively threaten me because I refuse to see myself as a person so resourceless as to require such coercive helps. People are no more born with this kind of self-respect than they are born with any other virtue. It is something we learn. One place we learn it outside the family has always been school.

A university is often supposed to be a community of an elusive and peculiarly intimate sort. Because Americans today think of the bonds of any community as fragile, we pass quickly from possessive to protective feelings about the communities we belong to. We know that fellow feelings can easily be spoilt—for example, by a wrong or ugly line of talk. One can detect in this train of thought the seeds of the argument that led some universities to adopt speech codes. Many such codes were passed in the late eighties and early nineties; several have since been overturned in the courts. It would be partial to mention these actions against free speech as if they were unrelated to other public innovations: "diversity training" at law firms, newspapers, and the most image-conscious of the big corporations; the new definitions of words carrying the force of action, which have also been tried out in court cases in recent years.

These moves to favor new tests of conformity and adjustment are based on a distrust of liberty, a distrust that can only corrupt the spirit of equality. At the bottom of the ministrations of the speech regulators, which would balance the violence of "remedial repression" against "the subtler violence of insult," we are not wrong to suspect the usual power-hunger of ideologists. And yet, we will get nowhere in these troubles if we refuse to recognize, somewhere in the same movement, the misdirected anxiety of the powerless. For this the only cure is education. And even as we guard against the conformity that follows from looking on every political ar-

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gument as having one right side, we ought to remember how much of learning and teaching is not involved with debate in any ordinary sense. If, finally, we side with Milton and Wollstonecraft and Mill, and we say again that the possibility of disagreement about *anything* is a necessary condition of intellectual life, that is not to say that it could ever be the sufficient condition. A climate of persistent and quarrelsome confrontation tells us only a little about the society that tolerates such a practice. The right to speak hardly matters unless there are people willing to use it with courage, and the total freedom of a society that tolerates many kinds of speech is judged, as well, by the things besides speech which it agrees to tolerate or to suppress. □

Oliver Conant

AT THE JOB CLINIC

ANXIETY. . . ANGER. . . LOSS. . . DISILLUSIONMENT. . . CONFLICT. . . CONFUSION. . . . SHAME. . . . The dark words, in tall letters on a large pad mounted on an easel, were being taken down with a felt-tip marker by a short, dapper man with an unflappable demeanor. He paused, facing his audience of thirty-five academics. "Any other words for the feelings associated with job hunting?" "Would despair be too strong?" asked a woman. Sympathetic murmurings of "no, no" ran around the room. "Terror?" inquired a man, just brightly enough to raise a small laugh. DESPAIR and TERROR joined the crowded page.

"Any *positive* feelings?" the dapper man asked a little pleadingly, turning over the page. Silence. "Energized?" someone ventured at last. "Anticipation," suggested another. Another long pause. "Guarded optimism." This from a tall Englishman in the back. ENERGIZED, wrote the man, with perceptible relief. ANTICIPATION. GUARDED OPTIMISM.

The setting for this curious scene, in which the atmosphere of a parlor game mixed oddly with intimations of free floating rage and desperation, was a meeting room in Chicago's Fairmont Hotel. The occasion was the first session of the 1995 Modern Language Association (MLA) Job Clinic, which was held from 6 to 10 on the evening of December 26, all day December 27, and from 8:30 A.M. to 12 noon on December 28. Eight men and twenty-six women registered for the clinic. Their ages varied, although everyone looked and sounded (even the twenty-somethings) distinctly middle-aged. About half were from the East (seven New Yorkers, including two from Brooklyn). The rest were from all over the South and the Midwest. The group was predominantly white, with only one African-American (male) and a Moroccan woman. I attended all the sessions, undeterred by Chicago's usual Siberian weather or the necessity of cutting short my attendance at my in-laws' yearly Boxing Day party.

It was my wife who spotted the item first. Always on the lookout for anything that promised, however remotely, to improve my income potential, obscured since the mid-eighties in pro-bono free-lance writing and a succession of teaching assistant and adjunct jobs amounting to little more than academic helotry, her sharp eye had gleaned a short item under the headline "Job Clinic on Nonacademic Careers" in the MLA Fall 1995 pre-convention *Newsletter*. The Clinic, the announcement stated, is intended for members "interested in employment outside the academy," and is "designed to help participants learn to identify career options and marketable skills, prepare effective letters of application and résumés, locate jobs, and improve interviewing and negotiating skills. It is especially recommended for those considering nonacademic professional careers." (Nothing about DESPAIR or TERROR—but maybe these are assumed.) "Why not go," my wife suggested, "and check it out?" "But it's $205!" I protested, pointing to the announcement's bottom paragraph.

"Worth every penny," she said, "if . . . ."

I knew, "if." If it got me out of my rut. If it brought me any nearer to solving what I had been coming to think of as the Riddle of The Job.

We were a curious bunch: an Awkward Squad, still members of a kind of clerisy, aloof from the getting and spending carried on outside the academic walls, averse to the language of commercialism, suspicious of the governing

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assumptions of American life. We were the ones to be found in out-of-the-way offices, hunched over student themes, taking our blue pencils to innocent replications of the vulgarity of the air waves and the clichés of popular journalism. ("Are you the blue pencil?" I remember a little group of undergraduates calling out to me as we passed one another on Broadway. "I am," I said. The moment seemed to call for a slight bow and an icy smile, but I think I just grinned foolishly.)

But here we all were, at the Job Clinic. There were surely a few good Foucauldians among us—there was a young woman from the French department at Duke, an inquirer, she told me, into the fetishistic character of Enlightenment discourse—but neither she nor anyone else was heard to point to the irony. Perhaps the occasion was beyond irony—in that respect rather like the MLA itself.

Was the experience worth the price of admission? I think so, if not entirely for the reasons specified in the *Newsletter*. I did, it's true, improve my résumé. I had omitted all dates, reluctant to advertise my practically superannuated graduate student status. "People will think you're hiding something," I was told.

What really made it worthwhile was, rather, just the experience of being one of thirty-five like-minded individuals, all in roughly the same quandary: discouraged dissertators, Ph.D.s on the adjunct treadmill, full-time teachers recently denied tenure; any experience of community in the face of adversity can have a cheering effect. To this was added what amounted (in my case, anyway) to a species of moral relief. Here at the MLA, instead of hiding behind our badges and institutional affiliations, instead of perpetually "preparing a face to meet the faces that we meet," we were coming clean—finally admitting, just by our presence in the room, what so many of us had for so long kept hidden even from ourselves: the realization that the academy was not and would not be our home, that for us life's paths looked to be leading elsewhere.

Suggestions as to where turned out to be the province of Howard Figler, who described himself as "a career counselor, with a Ph.D. in psychology." (The Ph.D. appears on his business card, on his stationery, and on each page of three Xeroxed booklets handed out at the meetings, pages filled with "Occupational Options," from federal government jobs to work in advertising, computer services, fashion, travel, and hotel/motel management.)

Like the lady on *Saturday Night Live*, Figler has made a career out of talking to people about their careers. Not just academics, he tells us late in the sessions, but ex-military personnel, as well, whose adjustment to the business world might well be even more wrenching. Figler is the author of *The Complete Job-Search Handbook: All the Skills You Need to Get Any Job and Have a Good Time Doing It*, a work we were all urged to purchase and read before we came. I couldn't quite make out who he is. He seemed to emanate pure hucksterism one moment and genuine concern the next. I was startled when, during a break in the proceedings, he told me that one of the high points of his career was getting the dystopian public policy analyst Jeremy Rifkin to speak at a symposium he had helped to organize.

For his current audience, Dr. Figler was there to say that yes, there were jobs out there, and people willing to pay us to do them. It was all a matter of doing what any good salesperson does every day: "needs assessment," "networking," and "informational interviewing." Provided, of course, that we had given sufficient attention to identifying our "transferable skills."

In order to arrive at a sense of what these might be we had all been required in advance to write down a minimum of fifteen "accomplishments" in which we took pride. These were then swapped around the tables at which we sat in groups of five or six.

At my table, a young Germanist had successfully set up a computer lab to bring technophobic departmental colleagues up to speed; a linguist created (in another lifetime, he said wistfully) several original musical compositions, some of which had been performed; a Renaissance literature teacher advanced to a black belt in the martial art of Kendo; an Americanist and film student at Yale had produced a documentary film that received some air time in the Northeast. My accomplishment was having written a study

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guide to *Hard Times* for a publishing rival of Cliff Notes. These accomplishments were not, to be sure, on the order of "deciphered Linear B" or "fought the Battle of the Bulge," but they were respectable enough. The challenge then became to discern in them the skills that had gone into making them possible, matching them to an extensive list of skills—the famous transferable skills—listed in one of the booklets. ("Communication Skills," "Computer Skills," "Design and Planning Skills," "Organization/ Management Skills," "Self-Management Skills," "Research Investigation Skills," and so on.)

Thus the Germanist, our table decided, had shown, apart from the obvious computer skills, "self-initiative" (a "Self-Management" skill) "persuading" (a "Communication" skill) and several other skills besides. The new black belt was clearly another case of self-initiative, as were the former composer and the documentary film producer. (As a term, "self-initiative" seemed a damned silly redundancy for "initiative," but one was not inclined to quibble.) My own accomplishment garnered me all kinds of skills—researching, of course, and "analyzing data" but also "translating." By translating, my obliging tablemates appeared to mean managing to convey the baroque drollery and satire of Dickens into language that even postliterate high school and lower division undergraduates could understand.

By the second or third round of this, carried on at other tables among different participants (it was an imperative of Dr. Figler's that we mix constantly, getting a feel for the networking to come), the accomplishments were getting a little thin. "Finding a pair of Ann Taylor pumps—on sale" volunteered, *sotto voce*, a charming young ex-dissertator. "Learning to drive," rumbled a large Slavicist. "Assembling children's furniture—you know, the kind from IKEA," I was finally pressed into revealing. "Analyzing," several people said at once. "Physical coordination," said another, beaming at me.

The next step was to draw up all our newly perceived skills, write them down on large sheets of newsprint—why newsprint? I don't know—and hold them up to each other, inviting suggestions for possible career directions. Mine was fairly typical. Under skills I wrote "Analyzing," "Translating," "Research," and a few others. "Have you ever considered going into the field of health care?" someone asked, after long scrutiny of my list. It was not to be the most unexpected suggestion: I was also proposed for "TV talk show host" and "stand-up comic."

Later, back in the depressive atmosphere of the "real" MLA—after the Clinic finally wrapped up in in a flurry of mock interviewing, talk of "Connecting to the Needs of the Employer," "interim jobs," and parting advice from Figler to "smile on the telephone" and "never overlook the power of the thank-you note"—I tried to explain to friends how I had been passing my time. I was met with considerable incredulity. "You did *what*?" "*How* much did they charge?" I just smiled and let them scoff. It was true, it had all been extremely wishful, ritualistic, naïve, a three-day immersion in psychobabble and mutual massage. But the TERROR of the first day had been a little dispelled—and not a little of the SHAME.

And that's not a small thing, because these emotions are real, and hard to live with—as are the market conditions that create them. The Job Clinic I attended, or some version of it, has been offered at the annual meetings of the Modern Language Association since 1984. The drastic shrinkage of the academic job market, the overproduction of Ph.Ds, and the scandal of adjunct labor—an astonishing 40 percent of college and university instruction is now undertaken by part timers who typically have no voting rights, no benefits, and no union representation—are circumstances that all the bromides in Dr. Figler's pharmacopoeia will not make go away. □

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George Packer

LEFT-WING SNOBS AND THE STYLE OF CONTEMPT

Political impotence doesn't always weaken the critical faculties, and some degree of aloofness from the well-known corruptions of power and money is essential for an independent social observer. Less known, though, is the effect on those faculties of going years without a chance that your ideas might be realized, of never having to ask yourself what you would do in such-and-such a situation if you had the power to do something. Without occasional exercise in the world, political writing tends to atrophy. Faced with their own long-term irrelevance, critics on the American left are confronted with several ways out, none of them satisfying.

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY

Lewis H. Lapham, HOTEL AMERICA: SCENES IN THE LOBBY OF THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE (Verso, 1995).

Lewis H. Lapham, THE WISH FOR KINGS: DEMOCRACY AT BAY (Grove Press, 1993).

Gore Vidal, PALIMPSEST: A MEMOIR (Random House, 1995).

Gore Vidal, UNITED STATES: ESSAYS 1952-1992 (Random House, 1993).

They can make their meek adjustments and position themselves more opportunely—maybe not as far as the spent generation of neoconservatives, but close enough to the center of the room to have an occasional say in the political conversation. They can leave the room, write about other things. They can announce that the *real* conversation is actually happening on another floor, in departmental offices and professional journals. They can try to straddle the actual and the theoretical, engaging policy fights while keeping one eye out the window on the horizon (this has been *Dissent*'s way, and its risks are earnestness and muddle-headedness).

There is another approach, in some ways the most attractive one. Instead of continuing to make grubby distinctions and, inevitably, compromises about what goes on in the room, one can rise to the ceiling, look down on the stupidities of our age, and comment witheringly. A number of qualities make the contemptuous stance appealing. Contempt is *knowing*: it implies a reserve of wide and hard experience (and much better to be thought a snob than a fool). It maintains a specious sort of engagement without risk of taint. It is clear: instead of having to make new judgments every day, contempt already knows what it thinks about everything. It has ready access to various types of wit, including satire and irony in all its shades—in fact contempt comes equipped with its own prose style, a light, deft, dancing technique that manages to punch and elude in the same motion. Above all, contempt seems irrefutable, since human beings more often than not act out of selfish motives and politics is largely a record of folly and corruption.

Political snobbery—a contempt for the entire governing class that almost invariably, though not as vocally, extends to the governed who blindly give their consent—is different from the populist mockery on talk radio because its tone is amusement, not rage; it implies superiority rather than subjection to politics. Su-

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perciliousness toward one's own age, combined with ignorance of the actual lives of ordinary people, is a stance historically identified with the privileged right. Reformers can't afford to leave the room because what they want to reform will still be inside. Revolutionaries want to blow the room up, but you can't go on being a revolutionary decade after decade if revolution is out of the question and no one is paying attention. Most snobs end up as reactionaries for the obvious reason that the past offers a desirable alternative to the evil present and the impossible future. Mencken was the great American example of the twentieth century. But what is curious as the century ends is how political snobbery flourishes not so much on the right as among leading polemicists of the left and their journalistic imitators. Left-wing criticism ending in reaction seems like a paradox, until you consider the inhospitableness of recent times for more promising ways out.

Gore Vidal's essays, collected a few years ago in *United States*, together with his 1995 memoir *Palimpsest* show the corrosions of political contempt at work on an elegant and learned mind. Most of the essays that deal with literature, or with politics and politicians before around 1900, are superb. The range of his interests is remarkable, and so is his knack for creating vivid little narratives that go to the heart of the moral and psychological condition of historical figures. I doubt that there is another living essayist who could turn out twenty equally absorbing pages on the life and work of William Dean Howells—or who would bother to try. Howells's response to the 1886 Haymarket Square riots and the execution of supposed anarchists was initially brave, leading to two scathing letters to the editor. "Next week," Howells wrote in the second, after the hangings, "the journalistic theory that they died so because they were desperate murderers will have grown even more insufficient than it is now for the minds and hearts of dispassionate inquirerers, and history will make the answer to which she must adhere for all time, *They died in the prime of the First Republic the world has ever known, for their opinions' sake*." The letter is a wonderful example of the eloquence that comes when a good writer's blood is up and something real is at stake, of a polemic that is more interested in exposing an injustice than sneering at the bottom feeders and fools who let it happen. But the letter was never published, and Howells probably didn't send it. Vidal lays out his dilemma with a novelist's insight and forbearance: "I suspect that the cautious lifetime careerist advised the Tolstoian socialist to cool it. Howells was in enough trouble already . . . . So he was heard no more on the subject. But at least he, alone of the country's writers, had asked, publicly, on November 4, 1887, that justice be done" [*U.S.*].

Vidal extends this imaginative sympathy to a range of historical subjects—the farther away in time, the more complex his feeling, the greater his tolerance. In his essays, and more explicitly in his memoir, there are two American golden ages: the pre-expansionist early republic, 1787-1803; and the post-war, pre–cold war Pax Americana of 1945-1950. According to Vidal, who learned Jeffersonian principles from his grandfather Senator Thomas P. Gore of Oklahoma, the first years of the republic were golden (or at least yellow, since men of property were in charge from the beginning) because they approximated Jefferson's dream of "a society of honest yeomen, engaged in agricultural pursuits, without large cities, heavy industry, banks, military pretensions" [*U.S.*]. But this republican dream is doomed to remain nostalgic, for Vidal doesn't admit or work out the tension between Jeffersonian individualism and his other desire for economic equality in the modern state. The second golden age was largely personal, coinciding with the social and sexual adventures and the sudden rise to fame and then notoriety of a certain very young novelist. The first ended with the Louisiana Purchase and what Vidal calls "Jefferson II." The second ended with McCarthy, Korea, and Vidal's fall from grace due to the homoeroticism of his third novel, *The City and the Pillar*. "Fascism was taking off," he writes in *Palimpsest*, "never to come to earth again, though it is, occasionally, put briefly on hold."

He could have written "Fascism was taking off" and left it at that. McCarthyism must have

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seemed a mild version to anyone having fled the real thing in Europe, but its totalitarian shadings were ominous enough to excuse some hyperbole. But "never to come to earth again" rounded the metaphor off too irresistibly, an image of blithe polemical daring (though "put briefly on hold" carelessly mixes it up). One has the sense of a rhetorical shrug—of the writer telling himself, "What the hell, go all the way with it." If "fascism" had come back to earth around 1955 the sentence would have gained in truthfulness and seriousness but suffered irreparable stylistic damage. And since contempt is so much a matter of style, this is a trade-off Vidal couldn't afford. So the throwaway clause betrays him.

This note of apocalyptic ennui keeps intruding on his later essays whenever they turn from history to the present. Vidal's imaginative vision, capable of great subtlety and precision when focused on 1776 or 1886, grows increasingly blurred and unable to make distinctions the nearer it comes to 1996. At the height of Watergate he wrote in the *New Statesman*, "I do not think that the American system in its present state of decadence is worth preserving," which was exactly the wrong conclusion to have drawn from Nixon's crimes. By his actions Nixon showed that in a sense he shared Vidal's view, for if as vague a phrase as "the American system" means anything, it means the legislative and judicial and civic forces that exposed Watergate and brought Nixon down. "In its present state of decadence" is permanently irrefutable. Who would deny it, especially today, given soft money and Dick Morris and Dwayne Andreas and the Reform party? What the sentence offers us is a satisfying feeling compounded of disgust, superiority, and assent. But analytically it is worthless.

Vidal grew up in Washington, D.C., and spent the first half of his life (the period covered by *Palimpsest*) close to politics and political figures: first his grandfather, later the Kennedys. "I had missed all the wars of ideology that for twenty years had convulsed New York intellectuals. Debates at school and around the family dinner table concerned 'real,' not theoretic, politics: Do we go to war or not?" In *Palimpsest* he portrays his role at Camelot as that of an unwilling but coveted dinner guest who speaks witticism to power and then leaves. "I have never liked parties of any kind, and the grander they are, the less I like them. Also, a court affair—if one is not a courtier—has a certain nightmarish quality as everyone tries to get the attention of the sovereign." This is having it both ways on a grand and nasty scale: name-dropping Jack and Jackie as intimates (no one, not even Vidal's hated mother, appears on as many pages of this memoir as JFK) while seeing straight through the Kennedy mystique. Jack emerges as a competitor with Vidal in the sexual Olympics. Jackie first appears teaching Vidal's half-sister Nini how to douche on her wedding day. All memoirs are dishonest in as much as they are written for revenge, but *Palimpsest* puts its own spin on mendacity. Vidal (who quotes Montaigne on the dehumanizing effect of lying) gets even for the supposed lies of family and friends by shining the light of truth on their sexual secrets (how his mother had to spoon in his partly impotent stepfather's semen; how in 1953 in the Chelsea Hotel he "fucked" Jack Kerouac, who then borrowed a dollar for subway fare that he never paid back)—all the while assuring us that he has never felt either sexual or professional jealousy, nor any interest in the sex lives of real people.

After losing a race for Congress and falling out with the Kennedys, Vidal returned to novel-writing and left the country. By 1972 he had installed himself in a villa on the southern Italian coast; and, perhaps not coincidentally, it was at this time that his political thought emerged, in an essay called "Homage to Daniel Shays," under the influence of the sociologist G. William Domhoff, with the idea that there is only one party in American politics, the Property party, controlled by a plutocratic elite, which beguiles the public every four years by inventing issues to distract it from the robbery taking place. From non-courtier-at-court to Tom-Paine-on-the-Tyrrhenian took Vidal about a decade. In a sense he didn't have far to go. Between Camelot and Weltschmerz there is a straight line of privilege. Vidal's political style depends on there being nothing at stake. You can dine with

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the Kennedys at Hyannisport, you can write about their douches and bathtub sex, you can condemn to oblivion the system that you've been dining on, you can dream that America's last best hope is Jerry Brown. None of it really matters among the chestnut trees at Ravello, where "the reflection of the intense gold light through the green leaves is dazzling. I ponder the eventual scorching of these woods, to be followed by the creeping flow of sterile ice. World disaster is always comforting to contemplate if not to undergo . . . . I do not want anything. I am past all serious desire for anything—at the moment, anyway."

Since most people haven't gotten past all serious desire for anything and so can't afford to abolish "the American system," whatever its state of decadence, they're condemned to endure if not accept a measure of folly and corruption—to tinker. G.K. Chesterton explained this in a few lines that Lewis H. Lapham uses as an epigraph to an essay in the August 1996 *Harper's*: "The poor have been rebels but they never have been anarchists; they have more interest than anyone else in there being some decent government; the poor man really has a stake in the country. The rich man hasn't; he can go away to New Guinea in a yacht."

The context for this quotation is an odd one, because Lapham himself stands in the lineage of Vidal, being wealthy, on intimate terms with the court, and drily contemptuous of the sham democracy America has become since Reagan and maybe Kennedy. A typical column in *Harper's* starts with Lapham happening to "find myself" at a luncheon on the Upper East Side or a high-level policy conference in Washington. Then, "by the time the waiters replaced the grilled rockfish with the roast pheasant" or "during the interval between the champagne and the cassis sorbet" [*Hotel*] or "by the time of the lemon sorbet," he realizes (once again) that America has become a democracy of, by, and for the rich. Yet they keep inviting him, and he keeps going, and his store of anecdotal evidence keeps growing. Like Vidal, Lapham is always a reluctant participant, though unlike Vidal he keeps most of his thoughts to himself until he sits down to write one of his "Notebooks" (in which other dinner guests appear usually without names and always without sexual details).

To Lapham, the American system is "Democracyland," "Versailles on the Potomac." All of its institutional players—politicians, businessmen, think-tankers, journalists, novelists, academics—have been bought off by power and money, a pack of self-promoting "courtiers" (cf. Vidal) who give high-minded after-dinner speeches and tremble at any democratic noise out on the street. For those of us who don't get invited to State Department dinners, Lapham is our food-taster and spy at conclaves of the elite, letting us know through the back door that they are far more hollow and corrupt than we ever imagined, before returning in time for the marinated shrimp.

Some of his columns were collected last year in *Hotel America: Scenes in the Lobby of the Fin-de-Siècle*, having already been recycled in *The Wish for Kings: Democracy at Bay* (1993). His polemical gifts come through best in the monthly format: the witty analogy, the move from particular satire to general lament, the deep familiarity with elite speech and habits, the willingness to make enemies, the passion for a democracy of free thinking. But over the course of a book the contemptuous tone is tiresome, and it becomes clear how much the argumentative scores depend on metaphor. *The Wish for Kings* is entirely governed by the metaphor of the court. Most of it continues without resistance at the same rhetorical level: "As with the New York literary mises-en-scène, so also with the Washington public policy institutes. Most of the political intellectuals whom I've encountered over the last twenty years might as well be wearing the liveries of their monied patrons—red brocade and silver piping for the American Enterprise Institute, blue velvet and gold braid for the Brookings Institution . . . ."

Of course there's no reply to this kind of attack ("I am not a courtier"?), and unless you happen to be one yourself it offers the pleasure of seeing the powerful draped in ridicule. It also carries an undeniable truth, even more now than when Vidal was making the same claims twenty years ago. The rich *have* gotten away with murder, politics *is* soaked in money, journalists *are*

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self-satisfied and cozy with power. But political contempt is static, indiscriminate, and ultimately as complacent as the system it indicts. It doesn't allow for exceptions (and exceptions can make some difference), and it's useless for the purposes of action in the world most of us have to live in. Two Lapham columns from 1994, one on foreign and one on domestic policy, show the inadequacy of his style for answering real questions like the one that confronted William Dean Howells, who cared passionately and had something to lose. After the United States intervened to end the atrocities in Haiti, Lapham neither attacked nor defended, but merely sniffed that "the Haitian expedition had shown what could be done with some first-rate sentiment, enough helicopter gunships and 20,000 combat troops" [*Hotel*]. When health care reform was losing in Congress, and intellectuals might have made a difference in rallying public opinion against the insurance companies, he devoted a column to praising Seneca's stoicism and ridiculing "the belief that death is a mistake and disease an accident distinctly un-American" [*Hotel*].

The obvious reply that this doesn't come well from a man with the best doctors at his disposal is only a retort, not an argument. The deeper objection is that the style of political contempt doesn't let us negotiate between criticism and action in a corrupt world *today*. Eventually it dulls both the will and the analytical tools we need in order to act. It becomes a reflex, a comfortable tic. When Lapham sketches his positive vision of democracy, like Vidal he has to wish away history, the present, and social possibility in favor of a very unironic idea of individual freedom, this one a blend of Jefferson, Huck, and Gatsby: "We are a nation of parvenus, all bound to the hopes of tomorrow, or next week, or next year . . . . If America is about nothing else, it is about the invention of the self. Because we have little use for history, and because we refuse the comforts of a society established on the blueprint of class privilege, we find ourselves set adrift at birth in an existential void, inheriting nothing except the obligation to construct a plausible self, to build a raft of identity on which (with a few grains of luck and a cheap bank loan) maybe we can float south to Memphis or the imaginary islands of the blessed" [*Hotel*].

An attractive idea, but if it ever described most American lives it has long since stopped doing so. A reactionary idea, too—a wish for a society in which social constraints and therefore interests and antagonisms, including those of class, don't exist. In praise of looking forward, it gazes back. It makes real, incremental progress impossible. So the court remains securely in place.

Political contempt seems incongruous with an ameliorative approach to society and government; yet it has trapped many of the left's best writers, and not only those wealthy or British enough to be able to afford it. Belief in something that isn't likely to happen in your lifetime eventually turns into negation of everything that is. What starts as analysis ends as a mental habit

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and a condition of soul—sweet but depressing, like too much liqueur. It's understandable as a symptom of atrophy, a style suited to a political tendency that has been marginal for almost three decades, but it should be left to those writers who really do have a hatred of progress. Neglect is harder to take than defeat, and one of its worst effects is to trivialize. We should have had better from writers like Vidal. How many on the left—on either side—combine his literary skills and historical knowledge with a willingness to enter the political fray, even run for office (maybe not the best use of intellectuals, but admirable)? Instead, from his Italian villa he took to sneering at America, hosting celebrities, and settling private scores in a malicious memoir. "A few of our writers have written on public themes," Vidal wrote in one of his later essays [*U.S.*], unconsciously describing his own fate, "but as they were not taken seriously, they have ended by not taking themselves seriously, at least as citizens of a republic." □

David Brody

MAKING SENSE OF REUTHER

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN DETROIT: WALTER REUTHER AND THE FATE OF AMERICAN LABOR, by Nelson Lichtenstein. Basic Books, 1995. 550 pp. $35.00.

Midway through his extraordinarily rich biography of Walter Reuther, Nelson Lichtenstein writes about an episode that occurred in 1947 while the Republican Congress was passing the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) called for protest demonstrations. Reuther, in his capacity as United Auto Workers (UAW) president, sent telegrams to all the Detroit-area locals ordering them to stop work at 2 P.M. on April 24 and assemble at Cadillac Square. This was a political strike, familiar in Europe, and since the late 1930s increasingly commonplace in American industrial centers as well; only the previous summer CIO demonstrations against the decontrol of meat prices had shut down many Detroit plants.

This time, however, General Motors (GM) drew the line. Anyone who quit work would be disciplined for violating paragraph 117 of the contract, which prohibited work stoppages. Anti-Reutherites on the executive board, and even some of his allies, wanted to take GM on, but Reuther said no: the UAW couldn't retaliate against GM for enforcing the contract. The strike call was not rescinded, but Reuther backed away from it, and word went out to the GM locals not to violate the no-stoppage provision. The militants who did—most GM members waited until the shift ended before heading over to the huge rally—got fired or were given long suspensions. Scrambling to get them reinstated, the UAW bowed to the corporation's demand that it formally repudiate the contract violation. Reuther pledged that the UAW would never again call its members out on a political strike.

This episode serves usefully as an entry point into Reuther's career. The Cadillac Square demonstration might stand for all the possibilities contained within the industrial-union movement that sprang to life in the 1930s—shop-floor control, a voice in corporate management, a labor party, and, at its most spacious moments (to use Reuther's own words), the industrial unions as "the vanguard of America." Paragraph 117 stands for all those arrangements in collective bargaining, party politics, and bureaucratic unionism that confined and ultimately destroyed the grand promise of militant industrial unionism. And since, in the emblematic 1947 deal with GM, it was Walter Reuther who gave the word, he becomes the prime mover, the man who held in his hands, as the subtitle says, "the fate of American labor." That, at any rate, is the question posed by Lichtenstein's biography: why did Reuther choose paragraph 117 over the political strike?

Not, surely, because he lacked the vision. Reuther was a true son of the American left. His father, Valentine, was a Debsian socialist, a dedicated unionist. Walter and his brothers grew up talking socialism around the kitchen table; an imperishable boyhood memory was accompanying his father to visit the imprisoned Eugene Debs. For a time in the late 1920s, Walter drifted away, but the Great Depression restored his radicalism and made him a sparkplug in Detroit's revived Socialist party (SP) movement. By then, too, he was a seasoned tool-and-die man at the

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Ford River Rouge plant, part of that elite circle of skilled, class-conscious workers whom Lichtenstein identifies as the vanguard of auto unionism. His technical expertise got him a job at the Soviet auto works in Gorky, from which he returned in late 1935 just as the climactic drive for industrial unionism was gathering steam.

Reuther had missed all the preliminaries: the New Deal battles over labor's right to organize, which culminated, after many setbacks, in the passage of the Wagner Act of 1935; the great unionizing wave that had swept through auto and the other mass production industries in 1933 and 1934 and then receded, leaving behind the remnant organizations from which a new movement would have to be built; and, within the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the birth of an insurgent group of industrial unionists fed up with the old-line leadership and determined not to let labor's chance to organize the unorganized slip away. Reuther got home in time to drive with a carload of auto workers to the AFL convention in Atlantic City where he watched John L. Lewis defy the craft leadership and set in motion the rival CIO. Back in Detroit, Reuther wangled a membership card from the nearly nonexistent local at the GM Ternstedt plant (where he never worked). Two months later, at the South Bend UAW convention that overthrew the AFL-imposed leadership and aligned the auto union with the CIO, Reuther was elected to the general executive board representing Michigan. Thus, by something of a fluke, he bounded right to the top. But it was no fluke that he stayed there, as the UAW grew from thirty thousand members (few of them in Detroit), bested General Motors in the great Flint sit-down strike of 1937 and became a giant industrial union of half a million. In 1947 Reuther seized the presidency of the UAW for life.

Among the militant minority that built the great industrial unions there were many with equally strong radical credentials and better rank-and-file connections. But no one matched Reuther's organizational instincts, his unflagging energy, or his fertile mind. The ideas and schemes simply came pouring out—the alchemy of the 1936 sit-down strike at Kelsey-Hayes that got Reuther's West Side power base started; his strategy for defending the union wage structure against give-backs in the chaotic parts industry during the 1938 recession; the brilliant tool-and-die strike of 1939 that finally extracted exclusive recognition from General Motors. A year later, Reuther won national attention with his bold plan for achieving all-out production of military aircraft by retooling Detroit's auto plants. Reuther proposed that the entire industry be brought under national control, with the UAW and management sharing power over day-to-day operations. After the war, when the CIO seemed poised for great things, Reuther envisioned a restructured, full-employment economy achieved through the bargaining muscle of the industrial unions. Lichtenstein characterizes Reuther, at his moment of triumph at the 1947 UAW convention, as "the contemporary unionist who most clearly represented that meeting of organized power and social vision so vital to the creative future of America's working-class movement."

How do we account for Reuther's failure to fulfill his historic role? It might be argued that his social vision was inadequate to his task. By 1938, party people could see, as the Michigan state chairman remarked, that Reuther was no longer a real SPer, just "a trade union politician with socialist sympathies." He soon resigned over his inability to back the party ticket that year; it was too important to get pro-CIO Governor Frank Murphy reelected. In our own postsocialist age, however, it would be surprising to make much of Reuther's loss of SP guidance, and Lichtenstein does not do so. He stresses instead the other side of the equation: Reuther the trade-union politician. Lichtenstein quotes appreciatively Bert Cochran's recollection of the youthful Reuther as unlike "other auto union officials who avidly sought power; it was as if he were biologically structured for the quest." And he records in loving detail all the calculations, the factional shifts, the old pals abandoned, the loyalty Reuther demanded—"teamwork in the leadership"—once he got his machine installed, and, not least, Reuther's abiding anticommunism.

Communists were a force to be reckoned with in the early UAW, just as they were virtually everywhere in the emerging industrial-union movement. In Reuther's own West Side local, rank and filers like Bill McKie had earned their spurs on the barricades, while at the national level Wyndham Mortimer was a strong and re-

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spected figure. Reuther had returned from Gorky still enamored of the Soviet experiment and more than willing to work with the communists in the early Popular Front. He got a crucial leg up from them into the UAW and probably held a card briefly. But he was never integrated into the party (CP), and, once his base on Detroit's West Side was secure, his dealings with the communists were strictly as between power blocs, friendly while they battled the unstable UAW president Homer Martin and his (and Jay Lovestone's) Progressive Caucus, but then, after the communists betrayed Walter's brother Victor at the Michigan CIO convention of 1938 in a bid for Martin's allies, inveterately hostile. Lichtenstein calls Reuther's anticommunism "obsessive," but he is mainly arguing that Reuther was an opportunist using anticommunism to advance his factional interests.

There are two ways of thinking about Reuther's anticommunism. We might ask: what did it do to his progressivism? Not much in any direct sense, since Reuther's social vision never had its source in his CP connection. Anything beyond that would depend on his motives. We do not have to accept Lichtenstein's insistence on Reuther's opportunism. The abject reversals of the party line in 1939 and 1941 on Moscow's orders were repellent to Reuther, and he was vocal in his contempt for CPers as genuine trade unionists. If, as Lichtenstein reports, he called Harry Bridges a prostitute to his face, we can surely infer some principled conviction behind Reuther's anticommunism. It is, in any case, the second question that truly engages Lichtenstein's interest: not what his anticommunism did to Reuther, but what it meant for CIO communists. About this there really is no argument. Reuther was their most formidable enemy, not only purging them from the UAW leadership but sparking the drive to expel the unions they led from the CIO. It is a cherished belief among labor historians on the left that this deprived the CIO of its most dynamic elements and sent industrial unionism into decline. But Lichtenstein is writing biography, and there is no basis in his close account of Reuther's machinations for drawing that conclusion. He does not commit himself and, despite all he has to say, Lichtenstein is finally inconclusive about Reuther's anticommunism.

He is likewise inconclusive about Reuther as civil rights champion. Reuther's obsession with the politics of union control, Lichtenstein argues, prevented him from responding to black demands for a say in the union during the 1950s, thereby compromising the vanguard role he felt labor had to play on the civil rights front. Yet Reuther was also under real constraints. Even at the height of its power, the UAW could not defeat reactionary politicians who played the race card in the Detroit elections of 1937 and 1948. Reuther was forever after shy about venturing politically where the prejudices of white auto workers ran strongly, as, for example, over housing. The crosscurrents are bemusing: Reuther at Martin Luther King's right hand in the March on Washington in 1963 and at Lyndon Johnson's in the shameful denial of seats to the insurgent black Mississippi delegation a year later at the 1964 Democratic convention. Lichtenstein gives us superb accounts of both episodes, but reconciling them is beyond his reach, and he leaves us with the ambiguous remark that although Reuther's understanding of the linkage between workers' rights and civil rights "had many limitations . . . he never doubted that it was an absolute condition to the advance of his agenda."

What we need is some overarching thesis to make sense of Walter Reuther. Lichtenstein does take a stab at this. Assessing his emblematic abandonment of the political strike in 1947, Lichtenstein remarks that "Reuther had become a prisoner of the General Motors contract." Reuther may have been its prisoner, but the GM contract was mostly of his own making. And so, Lichtenstein proceeds to argue, was much else that, juncture after juncture, hemmed Reuther in. "His tragedy was that of a man imprisoned within institutions, alliances and ideological constructs that were largely of his own making." We have here, certainly, the kernel of a working hypothesis about Reuther. Unfortunately, Lichtenstein treats it more as a kind of literary flourish than as a tool for systematic analysis. In particular, he fails to pursue the critical question his formulation raises: not whether Reuther became a prisoner of

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what he had built, but whether he was a prisoner even when he was building. In so many words: how much scope did Reuther have to build other than he did?

Consider, for example, why Reuther's hand was forced in the 1947 episode. The basic terms of the union's relationship with the big auto companies—its contractual basis, the shop-floor regime, the rules of state regulation written into the Wagner Act—were givens, fixed before Reuther ever came on the scene. General Motors, moreover, was an immovable obstacle in Reuther's way. Once past the Flint sit-down strike of 1937, the corporation was prepared to compromise on many things but not on its core rights of management, not at the corporate level and not on the shop floor, which in the early years meant resisting what Lichtenstein has famously called "dual power"—parallel union and supervisory structures at the workplace.

Lichtenstein is terrific on this—his chapter should be required reading for all sentimental advocates of workers' control—but what he demonstrates is that dual power was beyond the union's reach. The battle was actually lost in the opening skirmish when GM disestablished the dense shop-steward structure and forced the union to accept a thinly stretched committeeman system that was no match for the company's first-line supervisors. On shop-floor issues Reuther was no patsy. He battled Homer Martin's capitulation on unauthorized strikes in 1937 and again, late in World War II, seized the initiative against the no-strike pledge. If (as always) there was calculation in these stands, Reuther's commitment to shop-floor empowerment was genuine; on this front no national UAW rival stood to the left of him.

But dual power could not be imposed on General Motors—this was Reuther's premise—so he put his mind to what could be achieved: a system that conceded managerial authority, yet ringed that authority with protective work rules and procedural guarantees. It was this contractual system that was at stake when Reuther came to the question of paragraph 117. He could abide by it or go hopelessly to war with General Motors.

If we subjected all the structures within which Reuther operated to this kind of analysis, we might come to differing conclusions about the degree to which those structures were the products of necessity. But we have would some fixed points for deciding about Reuther. Lacking that analysis, Lichtenstein is left finally on shifting and uncertain ground.

He rightly focuses on the collective-bargaining system segmenting the working class into haves and have-nots. Reuther recognized its poisonous inequity and twice, in the General Motors strike of 1946 and more tentatively through community organizing and the student left in the early 1960s, tried "to break with the insular bargaining patterns championed by state and industry." Why did he back off? Because, Lichtenstein says, giving us a choice, "when it came to the crunch, Reuther commanded neither the power nor the will . . . ." The only alternative, Lichtenstein continues, was a political realignment, which leads to this summing up of lost political chances: in the municipal elections of 1937, because of political and racial antagonisms dividing Detroit auto workers; in 1948, because of the cold war and Reuther's assault on the communists; in 1964, because of Reuther's attachment to Lyndon Johnson; and, in 1967 and 1968, when the Vietnam crisis offered one last chance, because of Reuther's fixation on the next round of contract negotiations. But then, bethinking himself, Lichtenstein adds that racial polarization was already depriving Reuther of his white working-class political base. With the ground under his rich narrative thus ever shifting, Lichtenstein can't tell us what we need to know to make our minds up about Reuther, or rather, he tells us plenty, only we have to make up our minds for ourselves.

Lichtenstein's own mind turns out finally to be affirmative. He entitles his epilogue, "What Would Walter Do?" This is the question Reuther's aides and successors must have asked a thousand times in the years after his death in a plane crash in 1970. Never mind that Lichtenstein has cast Reuther as the author of an imprisoning system that outlived him and imprisons the faltering labor movement today. In our distress we ask ourselves: "What would Walter do?" That seems right. Despite everything we suspect that, of all our labor leaders past and present, Reuther might have known what to do. □

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George Scialabba

COMMUNITY OR COLLAPSE

ENLIGHTENMENT'S WAKE: POLITICS AND CULTURE AT THE CLOSE OF THE MODERN AGE, by John Gray. Routledge, 1996. 203 pp., $29.95.

From time immemorial the prime agency of individual and social reproduction has been inertia, the biological form of which is instinct and the cultural form, tradition. That is to say, things were done because they had been done before—an efficient, though not infallible, way to achieve organismic and societal stability. Modernity is, in one of its numerous definitions, the progressive attenuation of inertia by consciousness. Where tradition was, there shall reason be.

In the classical account, science, democracy, market relations, and ethical individualism were born and grew up together, the offspring of modernity. The first modern generations looked upon what these phenomena had wrought, pronounced them good, and called for their indefinite continuation and extension. But subsequent developments have not been altogether satisfactory, notably environmental spoliation, advanced weaponry, totalitarian social organization, the destruction of peasant societies and folk cultures, widespread anomie, and an altered rhythm of daily life that has arguably produced toxic levels of stress and epidemic psychopathology. Many writers, from Pascal to Lasch, have rehearsed these ills and proposed that modernity be reconsidered. *Enlightenment's Wake*, a collection of recent writings by English political philosopher John Gray, takes its place in this antimodernist tradition.

Gray defines the Enlightenment project as a combination of rationalism, or the criticism and reconstruction of morality and politics by means of reason alone; universalism, or the supercession of fundamental cultural differences, which will eventually dwindle and disappear; humanism, or the technological subjugation of nature for human purposes; and scientism, the neglect or disparagement of informal, tacit knowledge. Each of these beliefs or hopes is, he argues, an illusion. Reason cannot resolve fundamental conflicts among values. It cannot define a universal human identity, or specify a universally valid set of rights, or formalize all local knowledge. Following Michael Oakeshott and Isaiah Berlin, Gray maintains that rights and values are frequently incompatible, even incommensurable. Our identities are inherited rather than created, the product of contingency and circumstance rather than choice. Much of our knowledge is embedded in traditions, in whole ways of life, and cannot be judged or even understood apart from them. This pluralism, powerfully and insistently stated, frames Gray's historical and political arguments. In particular, it motivates his rejection of contemporary liberalism, especially the Rawlsian, rights-based variety predominant in the United States:

> Because political philosophy in the Anglo-American mode remains for the most part animated by the hopes of the Enlightenment, above all by the hope that human beings will shed their traditional allegiances and their local identities and unite in a universal civilization grounded in generic humanity and a rational morality, it cannot even begin to grapple with the political dilemmas of an age in which political life is dominated by renascent particularisms, militant religions and resurgent ethnicities.

So far we may imagine Gertrude Himmelfarb and Irving Kristol nodding approvingly, perhaps with a murmured reservation or two. What lifts Gray's work far above neoconservatism in intellectual and moral seriousness is his forthright acknowledgment that unregulated market relations may ultimately be destructive of everything worth conserving. It is not that Gray underrates the merits of the free market. On the contrary, his previous book, *Beyond the New Right*, contained a strongly affirmative account of the moral foundations of market institutions; and his essay in *Enlightenment's Wake* on "Post-Communist Societies in Transition" is withering in its depiction of the legacy of central planning. But Gray understands, as many British and American conservatives do not, that the market is merely a means of promoting human welfare, one that must be adapted and modified by each community, not an immutable ordinance of suprahistorical Reason. It is true that self-reliance, self-restraint, and the other virtues fostered by market relations are indispensable; and that

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markets are far superior epistemically to any alternative yet proposed. It is also true that humans flourish only in the shelter of families, neighborhoods, tribes, traditions, and well-known and -loved places, and only with a minimum of economic security; and that all these things are threatened by the spread of market relations. To hold these discordant truths in tension, as Gray does, is an uncommon and valuable achievement.

In opposition to "market fundamentalism," which countenances levels of unemployment, forced mobility, deskilling, urban real-estate speculation, and so on, that are destructive of stable, healthy communities, Gray proposes a "social market" perspective. First elaborated in post-World War II Germany, social market theory views the market not as an ideal type that each society should strive to approximate but as one element in a society's ensemble of institutions and folkways, which it is policy's job to harmonize. The market should not command automatic legitimacy. Instead, as Gray puts it in a formulation that discloses vast common ground with democratic socialists: "In all those cultures where democratic institutions are themselves elements in the common conception of legitimacy, market institutions will be stable and flourishing only in so far as their forms and workings are acceptable, ethically, culturally and economically, to the underlying population."

What's heartening about this proclaimed subordination of abstract economic efficiency to actual human well-being is that he means it. In *Enlightenment's Wake* and in even more detail in *Beyond the New Right*, Gray argues that although competition, risk, and inequality are inevitable and in fact desirable, many people will nonetheless be entitled to public help. He proposes an "enabling welfare state"—a happy phrase, which strikes exactly the right note. His principle is that those who have fallen out of the market economy or never been part of it should be helped to enter it, and that such assistance should, whenever feasible, be provided through the market (though funded publicly, for example, with vouchers). Education, health care, day care, job training are all on the table and must, he insists, be funded not grudgingly but generously. Moreover, "enablement" (a decided terminological advance over "empowerment") mandates not only individual entitlements but also public goods (again, provided to the extent feasible through a market): clean streets, parks, urban transport, the arts, noncommercial scientific research, and so on. With gratifying impatience Gray waves aside objections from the doctrinaire libertarian right. The proper goal of policy is to preserve healthy—according to our admittedly fallible and changeable contemporary judgment—communities, not to maximize economic freedom and economic growth, abstractly conceived.

(On similar grounds Gray waves aside objections from the doctrinaire libertarian left to state action in defense of traditional morality. Although a self-described "ultra-liberal" in this area, he is scathing about the invention of "fundamental rights" by defenders of abortion, homosexuality, and pornography. All such controversies should be resolved through debate, negotiation, compromise—in short, politics—rather than by defining new and presumably unalterable constitutional rights. In the essay "Toleration: A Post-Liberal Perspective," Gray argues persuasively that the core proposition of rights-based liberalism—that the state should be neutral among all ways of life or ideas of the good—is incoherent. The right attitude for the majority in a morally divided community is tolerance, which is a solicitude for social peace arising in equal measure from self-confidence and self-doubt. Peaceableness and humility are not, however, the same thing as a refusal to make moral judgments.)

In "The Undoing of Conservatism" Gray mounts a harsh critique of free-market extremism—from the right. The post-World War II social compact in Britain and America provided for full employment and a welfare state financed by the proceeds of economic growth. Faced with stagflation in the late 1970s, conservative parties scrapped the social compact but retained the assumption that political legitimacy depends on economic growth. The resulting feverish pursuit of growth has, predictably, generated social instability. Now, Gray writes, "the dystopian prospect—not so far, perhaps, from the present reality—is of a highly dynamic but low-growth economy in which a permanent revolution in

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technologies and productive arrangements yields large-scale structural unemployment and pervasive job insecurity." The stability of communities and families—the highest conservative value, one would have thought—has been sacrificed to "microeconomic flexibility, productivity, and low labour costs." GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and global free trade are pernicious policies, likely to entail "costs in human suffering that may come to rival those of twentieth-century experiments in central economic planning." Gray's summary indictment should be tattooed on Newt Gingrich's forehead:

> The social and cultural effects of market liberalism are, virtually without exception, inimical to the values that traditional conservatives hold dear. Communities are scattered to the winds by the gale of creative destruction. Endless "downsizing" and "flattening" of enterprises fosters ubiquitous insecurity and makes loyalty to the company a cruel joke. The celebration of consumer choice, as the only undisputed value in market societies, devalues commitment and stability in personal relationships and encourages the view of marriage and the family as vehicles of self-realization. The dynamism of market processes dissolves social hierarchies and overturns established expectations. Status is ephemeral, trust frail and contract sovereign. The dissolution of communities weakens, where it does not entirely destroy, the informal social monitoring of behavior which is the most effective preventive measure against crime. [Gertrude Himmelfarb, please note.] . . . . The incessant change promoted and demanded by market processes nullifies the significance of precedent and destroys the authority of the past. Indeed it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that market liberal policy delivers the *coup de grace* to practices of authority and of subscription to tradition already severely weakened during the modern period.

Burke, thou should'st be living at this hour!

"Enlightenment's Wake," the book's last and longest essay, is a masterly attempt to think through the problem of modernity. The problem is that critical rationality, as propagated by the Enlightenment and modeled on the natural sciences, has (along with market rationality) undermined the cultural authority of virtually all moral values, norms, customs, and beliefs in virtually all modern societies. The moral foundations of Western culture have been hollowed out. To the question "why be good?" there is now no philosophically compelling answer, even if most people don't know it yet. The name of this condition is nihilism; the eventual result may be spiritual paralysis or, worse, a war of all against all and of all against nature.

Trenchantly and (for the most part) lucidly, Gray canvasses our alternatives. One course, advocated uncritically by religious fundamentalists and with great subtlety and rigor by Alasdair MacIntyre, is to return to premodernity. The Enlightenment, according to MacIntyre, was not merely a misfortune but a mistake: about moral theory, Aristotle and Aquinas were right all along. Gray disagrees and argues cogently that modernity represents not the abandonment but the consummation of classical and Christian thought. Together they form one tradition, which is now exhausted; no return is possible.

It is not, of course, everyone's tradition. Gray alludes frequently to the East Asian industrial nations, especially Japan, who appear to have achieved economic modernization without undergoing cultural Westernization. He hopes fervently that they never do Westernize, lest they suffer our nihilist fate. I think he underestimates the vulnerability of East Asian cultural traditions to the inroads of individualism and the blandishments of consumer culture. To paraphrase Freud: the voice of appetite is a soft one, but it does not rest till it has gained a hearing. In any case, as Gray recognizes, Western liberal societies can no more import the Confucian ethos than they can recreate the Christian one.

Perhaps we can muddle through? Why not retain liberal values but abandon the hope of giving them a philosophical justification? Why not, as Richard Rorty has suggested, affirm "Enlightenment humanism without Enlightenment rationalism"? That makes good sense to me, as Gray allows that Rorty's is "perhaps the most powerful attempt we are likely to see to reformulate liberalism in explicitly post-Enlightenment terms." Nevertheless, he rejects it as parochial and excessively sanguine. Public and private cannot be kept separate, as Rorty recom-

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mends. Political institutions are the expression of a culture and a cosmology. The institutions of bourgeois liberal democracy are no exception, and the culture they express is, Gray repeats, ephemeral and exhausted.

Well then . . . what? Gray's reply is unflinching and not in the least melodramatic: the human race, he concludes, may very well destroy itself or suffer increasing, and finally irreversible, cultural entropy. Even more likely, and no less tragic, we may deplete and disfigure the nonhuman world beyond recovery.

Unless . . . . Here Gray's accustomed lucidity fails him, or at any rate fails me. He finds some saving intimations in the later Heidegger, particularly the notion of *Gelassenheit* or "releasement," derived from Meister Eckhart and other German mystics. "Releasement," according to Gray, is a disposition to "wean ourselves from willing and open ourselves to letting things be"; to attend calmly "to beings, to the things of the earth, in all their contingency and mortality"; to embrace "the groundless contingency that makes and unmakes the world." In Heidegger's words: "Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it."

Out of respect for Gray, I will suppress my usual shallow, logocentric exasperation with Heidegger and merely observe that I don't find the above very helpful. I wish that Gray had, at the crucial juncture, not ascended into philosophical mysticism but instead descended into social criticism. I wish he had gotten down to cases, had said to his readers, humbly and prosaically, citizen to citizen: "Look, we can't all—all human beings, that is—have air conditioning, safari vacations, automatic dishwashers, cars that go faster than forty or fifty miles an hour, meat every day (or every week), high-definition television with scores of channels, and bulgeless, odorless, wrinkle-free bodies. We'll spoil the planet if we try; and besides, those things are not all that important. What's important is [my

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own list follows; I would have liked to see Gray's]: singing in harmony at least once a week; having a body practiced in graceful movement; taking part in frequent and lively political (or aesthetic or metaphysical) argument; knowing many poems and prose passages by heart; having wilderness nearby or at a moderate distance; and above all, having useful and (at least part of the time) stimulating work. What's more, everyone could have all these things without spoiling the planet."

There's something to "releasement"; I don't deny it. But I suspect we'll get a better sense of it by hearkening to Wallace Stegner, Wendell Berry, or Seamus Heaney than to Heidegger. Philosophy as practiced by Gray and Rorty can lead us out of the modern wilderness; but only imagination and social criticism can lead us (if anything can) into the postmodern promised land. □

David L. Kirp

"GAY RESPECTABILITY"

BEYOND QUEER: CHALLENGING GAY LEFT ORTHODOXY, Bruce Bawer, ed. The Free Press, 1996. 304 pp., $25.

Gay rights parades, those annual celebrations of the 1969 Stonewall riot, are festivals of the shocking. In cities across the land, Dykes on Bikes, looking for all the world like Hell's Angels, roar by on souped-up Harleys. Elaborate floats carry flocks of perfectly primped, bequined young men, queens for a day. And someone usually parades wearing only a smile.

Bruce Bawer despises those parades and the hypersexualized image of gayness that they convey. Pride days do not show *his* gayness, and amid the continuing struggle for tolerance they offer a "bonanza for the [intolerant] religious right." In *A Place at the Table*, published in 1994, Bawer spoke up for homosexuals whose sexual orientation, while more than a bedroom sport, amounts to less than a life. He wrote that book to describe "normal" gay life to the confused adolescent who, standing at a newsstand, furtively slips a gay porn magazine between the pages of *Rolling Stone*; to celebrate gay couples who have created their own havens in a heartless world; and to nudge the gay silent majority, those who don't act up or act out, into making themselves known.

Beyond Queer is the follow-up, a collection of essays written by people who think more or less as Bawer does. The authors of the thirty-eight chapters, all but two of them men, include familiar names like Andrew Sullivan, former editor of the *New Republic*, and some fresh voices, among them an Orthodox rabbi who shows off some fancy Talmudic footwork. Their immodest intention is to draft the platform for a new gay politics, one that rejects the in-your-face tactics of radical "queers," and the identity politics of "the gay establishment" in favor of a quieter push for acceptance and assimilation. *Up from the Ghetto* would have been an equally apt title for the book.

In the quarter-century since Stonewall, this critique runs, national gay organizations have accomplished nothing. Now it's time to move on: to stop hollering about rights and to cease raging, "like King Lear back from the heath," about the unfairnesses of AIDS, to stop equating gay concerns with other "left-wing" causes, as if "gay" were a synonym for "progressive"; to stop promoting promiscuity rather than commitment—in short, to stop being marginal and marginalized. "I am not a queer because I do not have to be one," writes David Link, a Los Angeles writer and lawyer. "I am not that different from most people in this country."

Behind this insistence on normality resides a desire to belong to the larger community, to be an unhyphenated (not gay-) American. To appear "normal," Link continues, provides the best chance "of starting a conversation . . . of changing a mind." Similarly, Bruce Bawer believes that "building acceptance of homosexuals is like teaching a language," so that gay, just like German, stops being gobbledygook. This requires tirelessly communicating in plain English until the homo-ignorant get the message.

That desire to belong, I suspect, resonates with even the most outwardly outrageous among us. At those gay pride parades Bawer abhors, the crowds reserve their loudest cheers for a contingent that's as main street as America itself: P-FLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Those hosannas signal a gay desire both

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to be liberated and to be acknowledged; to be understood, accepted—loved—for who we are.

Yet as other despised American minorities have learned to their sorrow, ignorance is not the whole of the problem. As I write, Pat Buchanan is making a handsome living by pandering to homo- and other phobias. The public schools of Salt Lake City, Utah have been ordered to bar all student organizations, rather than permitting a club with the hopeful name of the Gay and Straight Alliance to meet on school premises. My e-mail is packed daily with tales of verbal and physical assaults on homosexuals, collected by an electronic clipping service called Channel Q.

Every once in a while, the authors of *Beyond Queer* remember these facts of life. One essay dissects "Morality and Homosexuality," a *Wall Street Journal* screed, penned by twenty-one scholars and ministers, that rails against homosexuals' "predatory behavior" aimed at the "seduction and solicitation" of the young. Another describes a *Policy Review* symposium that condemned homosexuality as both cause *and* effect of much that ails the society, "a sign of civilizational decadence" that "produces a social evil." Bawer tells of his hurt feelings when his review of the film *Longtime Companion* is rejected by the *American Spectator* on the grounds that homosexual love must be inferior to the real (that is, straight) thing. In the face of these repeated slaps in the face, though, the authors' persistent surprise comes off as naïve or disingenuous. Sweet reason is what they have to offer by way of rejoinder, but learning about gayness isn't the least bit like learning German. All the tightly constructed arguments in the world aren't going to change the many minds unwilling to be confused by fact.

The central plank of the *Beyond Queer* platform calls for ending all discrimination by the state. Vitally, this means that gay marriages would be sanctioned by government. In the gay as well as the straight world, writes Jonathan Rauch, marriage would be regarded as the norm, the unmarried would be "pitied" (perhaps even "clucked over" by grandma), and divorce would be hard to obtain. Meanwhile, because the authors oppose penalizing *private* discrimination, employers and landlords would be free to indulge their prejudices against gays.

As long as government recognizes committed heterosexual couples, there's no logical reason why same-sex couples shouldn't also receive the civil blessings and obligations of such recognition. But logic is the farthest thing from the minds of those Christian Coalition stalwarts who, in the midst of the recent primary season, gathered all the GOP candidates to pledge their undying opposition to the idea. To the religious right, gay marriage isn't just another misguided policy nostrum. It's a sacrilege and an obscenity, something to be resisted as ferociously as state-sanctioned abortion. If even one state authorizes same-sex marriage—and Hawaii's Supreme Court seems poised to require this—gay rights lawyers are ready to insist that, as a matter of constitutional law, the other forty-nine states must recognize gay marriages. It's not inconceivable that this could turn into the Willie Horton issue of the 1996 campaign.

Perhaps that fight is worth waging—but is it worth waging right now? What's of more immediate concern to thousands of gay men and lesbians is that their sexuality puts at risk their homes and their jobs. Tough luck—this is just "private" discrimination, writes Andrew Sullivan, and so shouldn't be regulated by the state. Yet drawing so bright a line between the public and private realms makes little sense. Employers and landowners don't constitute a law unto themselves. Decisions about what buildings can be built or what job criteria can be fixed aren't just matters of private choice. They are also a public concern, which is why zoning laws and civil rights statutes are on the books. Rules that safeguard racial minorities, women, and the handicapped against discrimination were adopted by a society that believed government could distinguish between genuine privacy concerns and the preservation of prejudice. Why should sexual orientation be treated differently?

"A clarion call to the new gay intelligentsia," the dust jacket of *Beyond Queer* boasts, and at a moment when the tried strategies for promoting gay concerns no longer seem true, such a call is needed. But the note this volume sounds is badly off-key. □

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In Memoriam

Bernard Rosenberg
1924 - 1996

Bernard Rosenberg, a founding editor of Dissent, *died earlier this year after a long illness. The following remarks were delivered at his memorial service in May.*

I first encountered Bernie Rosenberg in Social Science B at Brandeis, where we read mimeographed chapters of Max Lerner's forthcoming book on American civilization, and Max sat on the stage of the largest lecture hall on campus and talked, with Leonard Levy on one side and Bernie on the other. Since Lerner was "the book," Levy and Bernie were "the bookends"—earnestness on one side, skepticism on the other. I was assigned to Levy's section, in recognition, no doubt, of my own undergraduate earnestness.

So I didn't get to know Bernie until I started going to *Dissent* meetings. I sat in those meetings with awe. That early group of editors was remarkable in their ability to define a political position . . . and demolish all immediately adjacent positions. Manny Geltman, who died last year, did this with an undertone of gentleness. Bernie did it with a wit so sharp that most of the people whose positions he demolished never knew how deeply they'd been cut.

Bernie wrote on a remarkable range of subjects in those years, but the article I remember best is the one that I co-authored with him: a very short piece in the Fall 1963 issue of *Dissent* calling for a third party presidential ticket of Martin Luther King and Walter Reuther. Bernie did the first draft. I suggested some small changes and signed on. Bernie didn't want to be alone in such a significant project; he needed a co-author to argue with. So, as soon as he was sure that I was engaged, he turned on me and demanded to know why I was advocating such an absurd political adventure. I could only stutter that it was his idea. And, then, despite the fact, which we both knew, that King and Reuther were preparing to support Lyndon Johnson in 1964, he insisted on a long discussion about which of them should head the ticket, our ticket. It had to be King at that moment, and yet Reuther was the older man, with a remarkable record of political struggle, a leading position in the labor movement, and much better social

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democratic credentials. This required a great deal of analysis and debate.

Bernie had his own earnestness. He taught me that you could be whimsical in politics, but only if you were seriously whimsical or whimsically serious—in any case, you had to be able to make an argument. Even his funniest pieces, his mockeries and send-ups of academic sociology, say, were deeply serious: close readings, tough-minded analyses, cries of anger . . . or despair about his academic colleagues. Well, near-despair, for Bernie's humor was always a sign of life and hope.

Among the early *Dissent* editors, he was the Americanist; he was also the American. The others were either born in Europe or in those parts of New York that were really parts of Europe, and they lived much of their mental lives in the midst of the Russian Revolution or the German Revolution or among the dissidents of East Europe. Bernie was born and grew up in Detroit, and had a feeling for and wrote about every aspect of American life: cities, factories, unions, streets, gangs, crime, ethnic and religious communities, culture and the arts. He went back to Detroit after the riots of the sixties; we sent him to Chicago to cover the Democratic convention in 1968: who else among us would know his way so well in cities like those?

Above all, he wrote about American popular culture; he was the enemy of kitsch in all its forms—an enmity that, I think, a lot of people misunderstand . . . as I misunderstood it in the early days. My wife reminds me of a summer on the Cape when we visited Bernie and Sarah in their new place in Wellfleet. We played with their kids, talked about this and that, got onto the subject of popular culture, and suddenly Bernie and Sarah were singing songs from the Broadway theater. They sang for two hours, song after song, and I was surprised and delighted, because I had thought that left-wing intellectuals (and I was trying very hard, very earnestly, to be a left-wing intellectual) were not allowed to like that kind of music. Bernie's hatred of kitsch sprang from a sense of the real possibilities of popular culture. He had high standards, very high standards, which he defended fiercely, but, unlike many European critics of kitsch, he was not a cultural snob. He was a radical egalitarian on cultural matters as well as on economic matters, with an American optimism that didn't diminish though it was often disappointed.

He had an American style or, better, an American Jewish style—the incredible wise-cracking quickness, the story telling,the singing, and an intellectual intensity that was expressed without jargon or pretension. He was a Detroit socialist (a Midwesterner!), a little different from the New York socialists, with whom he made a wonderful, a powerful, combination. We will find new combinations, or try to, because we are still committed in the same way as Bernie was, because there still needs to be a left opposition and an egalitarian vision, because comrades grow old and die and renewal is necessary. But at this moment, remembering Bernie, I feel the full force of a line from a song that he surely knew and liked: "There ought to be a law against necessity."

MICHAEL WALZER

Always "In Opposition"

When I heard the sad news, two memories came to mind. I met Bernie in September 1950. I had just finished my graduate course work and been lucky enough to get my first teaching job as an adjunct at Hunter College. I was assigned to its Bronx campus (now Lehman College) where Bernie was the sole full-time representative of its sociology department. We had lunch together that first day, and at one point he asked about one of my graduate school teachers, a well-known and influential sociologist. Like most of his graduate students, I had fallen under his spell, but, as I told Bernie, I had some serious reservations about his work. As soon as I said this I sensed a change in the atmosphere—from wary neutrality to warmth.

The second memory is of a conversation around the time of the election of John F.

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Kennedy, who entranced not only liberals but many socialists. A group of us were talking about the elections—it must have been during an editorial meeting break or at a *Dissent* conference. None of us was happy about Kennedy—I think we all had cast our usual vote for Norman Thomas—and Bernie was on one of his characteristic and inimitable riffs: trenchant social analysis laced with caustic wit—this time about Kennedy's politics and admirers. One of us, I think it was Manny Geltman, managed to interrupt the flow to ask Bernie what he would do if suddenly, through some miracle, socialists came to power—a socialist president and Congress. Without a moment's hesitation, Bernie replied, "I would go into opposition immediately."

But Bernie was always "in opposition." His cordiality at our first encounter was not due to the brilliance of my criticism of my professor but to the fact that Bernie perceived me as someone who was also "in opposition." (He was destined to be an editor of a magazine called *Dissent*.) To be "in opposition," however, has obvious disadvantages: one is an outsider without access to power or influence. Still, what Bernie knew, and built his intellectual life on, was that there were also advantages to being an outsider.

He once wrote that Thorstein Veblen's essay on the intellectual preeminence of Jews gives "us a sharper characterization of himself than any biographer would be able to provide" and this is also true of Bernie's book *The Values of Veblen*. Veblen believed, Bernie wrote, that the "social situation" of the Jews accounted for their achievements. The Jew was like Georg Simmel's Stranger, who, in Bernie's summary, "stands apart from the thoughtways that permeate his society." The stranger is an outsider, and Bernie quoted the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, who wrote that the person thoroughly submerged in his culture "can never truly see it, simply because he has no external point of view from which to look at it." Bernie drove the idea home by also quoting Sorel's more epigrammatic version: "It is necessary to be outside to see inside." Outsiders gain a perspective that, in Bernie's words, "may increase their acuity, heighten their perceptions, and multiply their insights." There can be little doubt that Bernie was embracing an ideal and thinking of his own "social situation."

At the turn of the century a Veblen could easily remain marginal, as his checkered academic career demonstrated. By the end of the century, however, it is harder to maintain that "external point" that allows the intellectual to "see inside" with the objectivity of Simmel's ideal stranger. It was one of Bernie's major complaints about mass culture: "Never before," he wrote in the introduction to *Mass Culture*, "have the sacred and the profane, the genuine and the specious, the exalted and the debased, been so thoroughly mixed that they are all but indistinguishable." Today, the outsider's perspective is always in danger of becoming grist for Charlie Rose's mill.

That, at least, was one fate he escaped. If he could never wholly conquer the torments of bodily pain, Bernie was always successfully "in opposition." We could always count on him to give us the benefits of the increased acuity, the heightened perception, and the multiplicity of insights that are now embedded in his books, essays, and remembered conversations. They are part of his legacy to us. The other part of Bernie's legacy is our memory of a determined outsider relentlessly looking in, and it will serve as a continual reminder that being "in opposition" can produce a rich heritage for those we leave behind.

MURRAY HAUSKNECHT □

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On Colin Powell

Editors:

Martin Kilson's article, "Colin Powell: A Flight from Power?" (Spring 1996) argues that Powell's decision not to run for president reflects an ambivalence toward power-seeking among the African-American middle class. Kilson suggests that Powell "didn't have the thirst for raw and messy power." I believe that this interpretation is wrong, both about Powell's calculations and about the African-American middle class.

The critique of the African-American middle class presented more than forty years ago by E. Franklin Frazier and approvingly cited by Kilson is very much out of date. It predates the rise of African-American mayoral candidates in the 1960s and 1970s. They often came out of the African-American middle class, and fought against huge odds to empower the African-American community. In deeply divided cities, these middle-class politicians were hardly afraid of "raw and messy power." Their achievements should have removed for all time the image of "bourgeois gentlemen" that Frazier pinned on the African-American middle class.

Richard Hatcher, Carl Stokes, Kenneth Gibson, Maynard Jackson, Coleman Young, Tom Bradley, and Harold Washington were great politicians in the heat of the arena, supported by the vast majority of all African-Americans, whether working class or middle class. They were also coalition-builders, expert in unraveling the biracial puzzle.

Kilson gives Powell too little credit. Powell has, quite simply, refused to be used by the Republicans. In this sense, he differs from the shameful Clarence Thomas, who gained a Supreme Court spot by playing the game of the Republican right wing. Had Powell really been a "bourgeois gentleman," he would have legitimized the reactionary takeover of the Republican party by joining the ticket, attacking affirmative action, holding out for no substantive change in the party, and being grateful for the handout. Instead, he has refused the second spot, spoken out for affirmative action, and made it clear that his heart is with those Republican moderates who protest the party's shift to the right.

Dated theories of the African-American middle class are less useful in understanding Powell than in viewing him as a socially liberal, moderate Republican who favors civil rights. He is in the same camp as Governors Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey and William Weld of Massachusetts, who are shrewdly playing for the year 2000. If Whitman and Weld are shrewd card players, why dismiss Powell as being afraid of power?

With Kilson, I see Powell as a potentially historic figure, a credible, electable African-American presidential candidate. I think much more of him because he has refused to jump at the 1996 opportunity—which is really a trap. Let the Republican party show that it is worthy of having him on its side.

RAPHAEL J. SONENSHEIN
Santa Monica, Calif.

Martin Kilson Replies:

Raphael Sonenshein's marvelous study of Mayor Thomas Bradley of Los Angeles places him among the top ranks of urban political analysts. So one listens closely to his commentary on anything one might write on African-American political patterns. And in general I liked Sonenshein's reactions to my analysis of Powell's quasi-presidential campaign that ended too soon. He is correct in underlining the power-mustering savvy of the political-class sector of the new black elite. However, he misconstrues my analysis of Powell. My characterization of Colin Powell's political stance as a kind of throwback to the Frazierian paradigm of what I call the "form-deferring" bourgeoisie is not meant to be a general formulation about the current cohort of elite African-Americans. Thus my comments about Powell as overly self-defined as a "bourgeois gentleman" and hesitant about "raw and messy power" applied to Powell alone.

I would suggest that my conceptualization of Powell's political persona as a kind of Frazierian throwback tells us somewhat more about the real Powell than does Professor Sonenshein's statement that Powell is merely another "moderate Republican who favors civil rights." Powell has an egalitarian vision that requires the government to play a proactive role in closing the status and social mobility gap between blacks and whites. I write these comments in the post-Republican convention period, so we are all now too aware of how the normal "moderate Republican" behaves toward serious egalitarian ideals and practices. We witnessed Jack Kemp enter that convention as, in the words of *Boston Globe* columnist Derrick Jackson, "a bleeding heart [Republican]"

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and exit as a rightist Republican.

It is, then, precisely because of Powell's unique version of a liberal or moderate Republican demeanor that, as I remarked in my article, "I [would] swallow some of my progressivism for a moment just to give a black military hero the chance to function as the whites' Great Black Hope. I [would] do this even though I am not sure about the outcome with regard to the basic needs of poor blacks." But we are in a post-convention era and I am sure that Sonenshein would agree with me that there are now good grounds for questioning my pre-convention optimism about Powell as a unique version of the liberal Republican. I'm afraid that Derrick Jackson, writing in the *Boston Globe* on August 14, is correct:

> Powell can dream that he has influence in the party. He can fantasize that he has moved it closer to being the party of Lincoln again. He is hallucinating that Republicans will cut corporate welfare and welfare for the wealthy . . . . It is easy for Powell the popular [African-American] private citizen to create the illusion that he can raise the party to his values. But if current nominee Bob Dole cannot get into the main party platform a simple statement that the party can tolerate those who support a woman's right to choose an abortion, Powell can forget it on affirmative action. One could say Powell has already lowered his values. He heartily supports Dole even though Dole is against affirmative action and turned down an invitation to speak before the NAACP. □

Health Care Reform

Editors:

Michael Tomasky's article "Why Health Care Reform Failed" (Spring 1996) contains a criticism of the left that is unwarranted. He states that one of the reasons the single-payer proposal failed was that its proponents put too much emphasis on the problems of the uninsured and not enough on the problems of the average insured person, and on the ways in which a single-payer program could have resolved them.

He is wrong. Jesse Jackson's introduction of the single-payer proposal in the Democratic party platform, for example, was a result of his campaign commitment to emphasizing class-based programs as a strategy to mobilize the working class and popular movements, not just the marginalized, the vulnerable, and the poor. As senior health adviser to Jackson and as his representative on the Democratic party platform committee, I was unsuccessful in convincing Michael Dukakis to run on issues, such as a single-payer system, that would mobilize the majority of the population, in particular the working class.

In 1992, Bill Clinton included the single-payer option in his otherwise large-insurer-oriented plan because of the large mobilization around a single-payer proposal. The drafting of the single-payer option (in the White House bill) took place one week after the president received one million signatures supporting the single-payer proposal. As chair of the single-payer ad hoc group within the White House Task Force, I could see the effects of mobilization in action. Immediately after the signatures were received, the ad hoc committee, largely irrelevant until that point, became a group whose opinions were much sought after. The single-payer proposal was defeated because the AFL-CIO decided to support managed care, which then became the "left" proposal (a fact not mentioned in Tomasky's article). It is difficult to believe that the Clinton proposal was the left-wing proposal, but that is how it was perceived.

The president should have encouraged a strong single-payer movement and proposal so that the Clinton proposal could have been the compromise, center proposal. With the elimination of the left, however, the Clinton proposal became the "left," moving the whole debate so far to the right that not many in the grass roots of the Democratic party mobilized. The main lesson of the defeat of the Clinton Health Care Reform is that, once again, the anti-left position of U.S. liberals is the cause of their own demise.

VICENTE NAVARRO, M.D., PH.D.
Baltimore, Md. □

ERRATA

We regret that the article by Charles Taylor in the Summer 1996 issue ("A World Consensus on Human Rights?") was not properly credited. It was adapted from a piece commissioned by the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs for its project on "The Growth of East Asia and Its Impact on Human Rights" and presented at a workshop on "Cultural Sources of Human Rights in East Asia" sponsored by the council and held in Bangkok, Thailand, March 24-26, 1996. A longer version will appear under the title "Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" in *The East Asian Challenge to Human Rights*, edited by Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell (forthcoming).

We regret an editing error in the sentence in Mitchell Cohen's introduction (Summer 1996). On page 9, first column, lines 11-12, should read: "according to him" (referring to Marx) not "according to them" (referring to the Austro-Marxists).

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The Last Page

After Ella Fitzgerald died last June, I picked out a few CDs, played them over and over, and became happier and happier at what I heard (except in the case of a horrible album with André Previn on piano, and a few cuts of the Cole Porter songbook, funereally arranged); and the happier I was, the more perplexed I felt about the state of American music. For the arts follow a very strange history, now up into greatness, now down, in no visible relation to the ups and downs of any other kind of history. Who can doubt, upon learning that Ella Fitzgerald has died, which way the musical arts in America have been going?

Ella was a singer's singer, which is not an altogether good thing. She was the jazz equivalent of a great opera soprano who can't act worth a damn. Whole sheafs of first-rate songs fall outside Ella's narrative or acting ability. To listen to her try to enunciate Porter's double entendres and wit can be positively embarrassing. The reason her duets with Louis Armstrong are so memorable and charming is because his own acting talent is great enough to compensate for hers, and vice versa with her vocal technique. Louis impersonates, Ella arpeggiates, and all is swell. The gift that she does have, as a lyric interpreter, is a rhythmic suavity, which you experience principally as a sense of ease. The clumsiest parsing in the lyrics—"Soon you will be on Sugar Hill in Harlem"—sounds conversational and natural in Ella's rendition.

Her absolutely best work is something you can hear only in a setting like that of the Duke Ellington orchestra, where the harmonic colors and the rhythmic sizzle are everything, and the theatrical or narrative aspects of a song are pushed to the background. Ellington is a master of bringing out the idiosyncratic timbres of each instrument and section, and in the Ellington arrangements Ella emerges as the band musician with the most variable timbre of all. She uses her range of vocal effects—now violin-like (for example, in the hands of Ellington's Stuff Smith), now like a sweet-toned alto saxophone, now like a trumpet shaking a note or a slithery trombone—to push the sound of her voice into a higher and higher energy, until she crackles. Her performances are at one with Ellington's ideals: a magnificent color spectrum, pointed toward ever more intensity.

Ella's greatness came about because of an unusual combination of musical events: the vogue of the big bands (with Ellington as the foam on the wave), combined with the high tide of the musical theater (meaning Porter and Gershwin), which led to a music that was original, creative, sophisticated, and yet—this is the part that astonishes us today—popular. I wouldn't dare to hazard a thesis as to why those several qualities long ago ceased to adhere in a single musical style. But where should we look for some such coming together in the future?

Allow me a guess: it will be in those several musical locales where the connection between dance music and big band serious jazz never did entirely die away, namely, wherever Afro-Cuban music has left its influence. The hottest pop music anywhere in the world today is Latin Caribbean—the most intricately rhythmic, the most virtuosic in its horn soloing (for example, the trumpet pyrotechnics of Arturo Sandoval, the Cuban refugee), the most disciplined in its ensemble playing (for example, the clockwork massed saxophone figures of Dominican merengue), the prickliest, the most thrilling. What will happen when the traditional twin capitals of the Afro-Cuban style—Havana and New York—are finally able to reestablish their ancient musical brotherliness? Something splendid, I predict. I'm daydreaming of course, but Ella's death has sent me into mourning, and a man is entitled to his consolations.

PAUL BERMAN □

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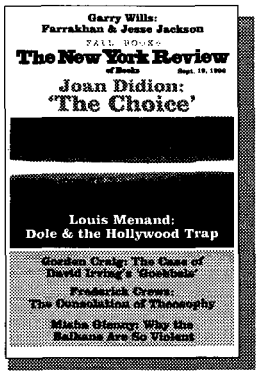

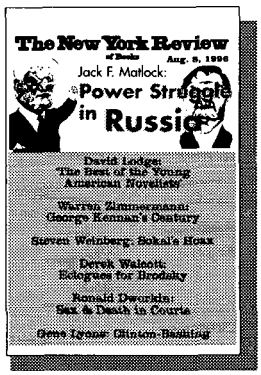

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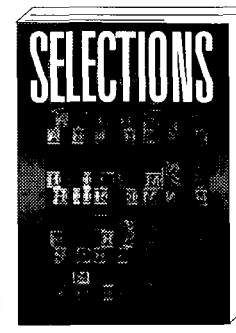

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